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The MASTER of STAIR

By

MARJORIE BOWEN

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Author of The Viper of Milan

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To Mark Twain
with deep gratitude for the flattering interest
shown by a great man of letters in
the work of a beginner

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GLENCOE

In the Glen o' Weeping,
The Valley o' Glencoe,
Watch the giant hills are keeping
In their frozen wreaths o' snow.
Tears from out the mists are falling
And the winds forever sigh
To the lonely eagle calling
As he circles through the sky,
With the blood o' the Macdonalds
All red upon his claws,
The blood o' the dead Macdonalds
Who broke the Campbell laws.

Through the Glen o' Weeping,
The Valley o' Glencoe,
Where the blighted trees are sleeping
And black the waters flow,
Where the dead lie in their darkness,
Their frozen hearth beside,
As the day glooms into darkness,
Come the living in their pride
Through the lines o' dead Macdonalds
Lying naked to the blast,
Through the stern and still Macdonalds
Come the Campbells riding fast.

GLENCOE

Now is the Glen o' Weeping
The Valley o' Glencoe,
Bright with light o' swords upleaping
And flashing to and fro;
And gallant is the seeming
Of man and horse together
As with flying harness gleaming
They ride the trampled heather
Through the homes o' the Macdonalds
Who lie defenseless, dumb,
Through the spilt blood o' the Macdonalds
The victor Campbells come.

Now shall the Glen o' Weeping,
The Valley o' Glencoe,
When our noble heirs are reaping
The deeds that now we sow —
Lie desolate, forsaken,
Bleak to the brooding mist,
While we our way have taken,
By winged fortune kissed.
Swept from our path the Macdonalds,
Swept from our path away:
Now out o' the Glen o' Weeping,
Into the light o' day!

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

RONALD MACDONALD

SOME fifty men were making slow progress through the pass of Glenorchy, which lies in the heart of Invernesshire and so in the very depths of the wild Highlands. A thick white mist hung over the landscape; it was the end of October and a raw and chilly day; the dull purple heather, disclosed now and then by the lifting vapor, the gaunt firs and faded bracken that grew along the pass, were shivering under the weight of dripping moisture.

The men strained their eyes to pierce the drifting mist, and drew closer the damp tartans that showed they were of the Clan of Macdonald; they were all on foot: some led shaggy ponies on whose rough backs were strapped packages and what appeared to be the plunder of some great house, for the objects included silver and gilt cups and goblets tied together by the handles; and, slung across the saddle, handsome garments such as the Saxons wore, and guns of a make not often seen in a Highlander's hands.

A drove of fine cattle were driven in the rear of the Macdonalds, and a man who was obviously the leader walked a few paces ahead of the others. He was distinguished from his followers by the faded laced cloth coat under his plaid, the pistols in his belt, and his high cowskin boots, the others being barefoot and wearing nothing but their tartans and rude garments of untanned leather.

The mist began to lift a little, the dim forms of the surrounding mountains became visible; the leading Macdonald stopped his men and looked about him: the mist had confused even his innate knowledge of the country. Such of the landscape as they could see was pure desolation, vast brown hills and tracts of heather: there were no roads, not so much as a foot-path to guide them.

The only sign of life was an eagle who circled high above their heads, and now and then swept into view, screaming dismally.

The leader of the Macdonalds shuddered in the damp cold and was making the signal for his men to continue, when his quick ear caught a distant sound. He paused, the train of Highlanders motionless behind him.

It was the sound of the jingle of harness, the soft thud of horses' hoofs on the heather: a party of horsemen riding near.

With the stealthy alertness of men who are always either hunters or hunted, the Macdonalds drew together in the pass; the foremost threw themselves flat on the ground and closed their hands round their dirks. The mist was closing round them again, but it was not so thick that they could not discern a group of horsemen crossing the pass at a swift trot. It was impossible to see how many there were; they were very swiftly gone, and utter silence fell again.

The Macdonalds began to move cautiously. The mist thickened so that they grew uneasy, their eyes were strained for another sight of the strangers, their ears for the sound of the bridle bells.

The eagle flew close, then past them and out of sight; they were feeling their way a step at a time, the ponies stumbled over the wet rocks the heather concealed, the men could

hardly see each other. They began talking in whispers, wondering who these horsemen might have been, disputing about the way.

Then it came again, the thud thud of a horse.

The Macdonalds stopped dead; their leader softly cursed the mist and held himself on the alert.

It seemed to be only one horse now, and very close; they could hear it slipping among the rocks, the sound of the clinking harness, but they could see nothing. It died into the distance; the mist rose a little and they caught a sudden glimpse of a red figure on a dark horse in front of them, then they lost sight of it again in the thick vapor.

They pushed on slowly, teased with the faint sound of the unseen horsemen, ready for a stranger and enemy, yet baffled by the mist.

Suddenly the sound grew louder; the Macdonalds looked round fiercely. Their leader was almost thrown by the swift passing of a huge brown horse bearing a rider in a scarlet coat, who crossed in front of him and was swallowed into the mist. He had only a glimpse, and the bells were again tinkling in the distance; the horseman did not appear to have seen him, but as he passed a whip had struck Macdonald lightly on the face.

With a fierce cry the Highlander was plunging through the mist after him; the sound guided him; he ran forward swiftly, maddened by that slash on the cheek, striving to cleave aside the blinding fog.

All at once he heard it coming again, saw the brown horse looming toward him, and made a wild dash at the reins. But it swept past him. He thought he heard the rider say something or give a little cry.

The mist began to lighten, grow thinner; he saw the rider ahead and ran after him with his dirk undrawn. His strength was almost a match for the horse which was evidently very jaded and weary; his rider looked back and urged him faster, but the Macdonald was gaining.

It was clear enough now for him to see who he was pursuing. A slender figure in a scarlet roquelaure with the collar turned up to his ears, his beaver and feather hanging limp with the rain; both his dress and his horse were of the lowlands. The Macdonald's eyes glowed at the sight of the Saxon; he was too stung to care that he had missed his men in the pursuit. He came on at a run, silently. The horseman had gained rising ground and stood outlined against the sky.

The mist changed to a drizzling rain: they were able to see each other distinctly; the tired horse stumbled and stopped, the rider wheeled him round and drew up, facing the Highlander. In the vast gloomy scene he was the only spot of color on his smooth bright chestnut horse with the glittering harness, with his vivid red coat and the long draggled brown feather hanging on his shoulders.

The Macdonald stopped a pace or two away from him that he might see who this Saxon could be, sitting very still and calm, with his head lifted — haughtily, it seemed. Then he cried out and fell back a step.

It was a woman who looked down at him from the brown horse: a proud, still woman's face that showed in the high collar.

She calmly viewed his utter amazement, sitting utterly motionless, very upright.

After a second she spoke; slowly, in Gaelic.

"What do you want with me?"

Her voice sounded thin and unnatural coming through the vast open space; she broke her words with a cough and shuddered as if she was very cold.

The Macdonald had stood motionless, eagerly surveying her; when she spoke he came toward her slowly, with the caution and curiosity of a wild animal scenting the unknown.

She too looked at him, but covertly, and her face expressed no interest as her eyes dwelt on his magnificent figure and torn and faded clothes; she waited for him without a movement or a word.

As he came to her saddle bow he pulled off his bonnet and stood erect in the straight rain, his frank blue eyes on her face.

"My name is Ronald," he said, "and I am a prince of the Macdonalds of Glencoe."

The horsewoman coughed and shivered again before she answered; she had noted the half-sullen, half-proud defiance of his bearing and replied to that:

"Why do you speak so?" she said. "You give your speech a turn of bitterness."

He came still closer and laid his hand on her fallen reins.

"I thought you were a Campbell," he said, and watched for the effect of the loathed name on her; there was none; she merely shook her head.

"I am a stranger," she answered. "I came with my kinsfolk on a mere family affair —"

His face lightened.

"I saw them through the mist," he said.

She looked round her.

"And now the mist hath gone and I am utterly lost." She shivered.

Suddenly she glanced down at him; he was very young, of a

giant's make; his square cut fresh face, tanned the color of ripe corn, looked up at her; his clear eyes were very steady under the rough brown hair; she gave a slow faint smile.

"Are you too lost?" she asked.

"It were not possible for me to lose my way to Glencoe," he answered. "But I have missed my men."

He was still studying her with a frank absorbed curiosity; she pushed her heavy rain-soaked hat a little off her face and at sight of her red-blonde hair, he cried out, fiercely:

"Ye *are* a Campbell!"

Her face expressed a cold surprise.

"I am Helen Fraser," she said quietly, "and no kin to the Clan of Campbell."

It would have been difficult to disbelieve her unconcern; Macdonald hesitated, not knowing what to do.

"Will you put me on my way?" she asked as a probe to his silence. "I am wet and cold — and most utterly lost."

At the note in her voice all his Highland hospitality woke.

"Will you come to Glencoe?" he asked simply.

She shook her head. "I must find my people," she said resolutely. "Tell me the way — they ride in the direction of Glenorchy."

Macdonald's eyes flashed.

"Jock Campbell's castle — you go there!" he cried.

"I go that way — not there," she answered, "but to Loch Awe."

He was appeased again. "Glenorchy is three miles from here," he said. "And Glencoe some ten — as you are a woman I will go with you to find your people."

She made no show of either gratitude or refusal. "I shall

die of cold," she said impatiently. "Take the bridle and lead the way."

The drizzle had settled into a steady downpour; the sky was a merciless even gray; the distant hills wreathed with heavy rain clouds, the gloomy rocks about them running with water.

Macdonald took the horse's head in silence and led him across the squelching heather. They were at the top of the ravine; the country before them was broken and utterly wild, but he had no fear of losing his way while he had the use of his eyes. The woman shuddered closer into her coat. "Put me on the road to Glenorchy," she said. "My people will be looking for me."

"Would you not be afraid alone, Helen Fraser?" he asked.

"No," she answered quietly.

"Are you friendly with the Clan of Campbell?" he said, "for you must cross their lands."

"I know nothing of them," came the tired voice from the great collar. "But — I say — I am not afraid."

He was silent again; he knew little or nothing of the distant Clan of Frasers, he marveled at the dress and refined appearance of this woman: he had never seen any but the Campbell's women in this Lowland habit.

Neither spoke as they wound through the rocks and heather; he at the horse's head, heedless of the cold and rain; she huddled on the saddle, shivering under it.

She spoke at last so suddenly that he turned with a start.

"Who are those?" she said.

He looked in the direction her gloved hand pointed.

From the branch of a great fir-tree two men were dangling,

the rain dripping forlornly from their soaked clothes and the fair hair that fell over their dead faces.

"Campbells," answered Macdonald. "Would there were more than two."

"She turned her gaze from the dead men; her face was utterly unmoved.

"How you hate these Campbells, Macdonald of Glencoe," she said curiously.

He was bewildered by her note of wonder, turned it over in his mind and could think of nothing to say but:

"I am a prince of the Macdonalds."

"God fend me from these feuds!" she cried. "My people live at peace."

"They would not, Helen Fraser, if they were two hundred men alone in the country of the Campbells." He looked at her over his shoulder, his color risen. "To one side of us we have MacCallum More himself — to the other Jock Campbell of Breadalbane and his vassals swarm in their hundreds — but we do no homage — because there has been no Campbell yet dare enter Glencoe."

He had stopped with the force of his words and his fierce eyes measured her narrowly.

She gave her slow smile:

"Well — go on," she said. "I have no call to be the Campbells' friend."

He went on at his steady even pace and she said no more.

They were crossing a level tract of moor; once she looked back at the men on the fir-tree; the rain was blotting them from sight, but she could see them faintly, dark against the sky.

Presently the dismal screaming of a bird of prey broke the desolate stillness.

"There is an eagle — has found a meal," remarked Macdonald.

"How he skrieks!" she answered, and leaning from the saddle peered forward. "Look — ahead of us —"

A great brown eagle was hovering a few feet off the ground and another circled slowly above him.

"What have they found?" whispered the woman. She looked half-eagerly, half-fearfully; they were near enough for her to see a tumbled heap of plaid in the heather with something smooth and shining white in the midst.

The eagle wheeled his slow flight closer and she saw that his beak dripped with blood.

"Who are those he feeds on?" she asked very low.

Macdonald turned the horse's head away from the eagle's orgy.

"It is Campbell's tartan and a Campbell's skull," he said. "What else?"

She was still straining her eyes after the ghastly bundle they were leaving behind them.

"It is a woman!" she cried.

"Yes," he answered, "we got her yesterday from Jock Campbell's house — we burnt a house of his two days ago — you could see the flames from here." His eyes sparkled with pride. "They were three to one," he added, "but the Campbells always fight like Lowlanders."

She put her hand to a face grown ghastly white.

"You keep your eagles well fed," she said. "I would not be a Campbell in your hands, Macdonald of Glencoe!"

He looked up, puzzled at her tone; he had not properly seen

her face nor could he see it now for the collar and the hat; it occurred to him that she did not understand the bitterness of this hate.

"There is the sword and the flame between us two," he said. "A Campbell has not broken bread with a Macdonald for a thousand years — we are the older race and by craft they have the mastery."

"Of the whole Highlands, I do think," she put in.

"Yes," he cried fiercely. "But not Glencoe — we have that yet, and we harry them and goad them to curses and slay them, and thwart them though we are but two hundred — now my tacksman return home with the plunder of Jock o' Breadalbane's house — we left his door-step wet with blood, not for the first time!"

She caught her breath.

"Some day you will pay the price," she said, "for he has the Saxons and the Southrons behind him — he is a mighty man."

The Highlander flung up his head. "Let the Saxons try to reach Glencoe," he said grimly. "Let Jock Campbell turn his claymores out to touch us here — there will be more blood for the eagles at Strath Tay!"

She lapsed into silence again; the rain was growing colder, changing into a fine sleet; she was numb and frozen.

"Give me rest," she said faintly, "or I die — is there not one hut in all this barrenness?"

He looked surprised that her endurance should be exhausted already; hesitated with a desire to be rid of her encumbrance.

She put out her hand and touched him delicately on the shoulder; for the first time he saw her eyes, green and very bright, as she leaned forward.

"Ah," she said very softly. "You would not leave me — when I am lost — or make me ride when I am like to faint — find me shelter for awhile, Macdonald!"

"I would not have left you," he answered, "and though I know none of you, Helen Fraser, I will find you shelter."

There was a wattled hut near by, often used as an outpost by the Macdonalds in their plundering raids; he turned toward it now; it was very little off the road to Glenorchy.

Helen Fraser looked at his great figure before her, his resolute strength, his firm face, and she gave a little inscrutable smile.

CHAPTER II

THE KISS

RONALD MACDONALD had kindled a peat fire in the hut and strengthened it with dried fir boughs from the stack of wood in the corner.

A bright flame leaped up and showed the rude interior, the mud walls, the earth floor, the rough-hewn log seat and the figure of Helen Fraser taking off her dripping red coat.

She flung it over the log, swept off her hat and stood straight and slim in her close brown dress, while she held her hands over the flame.

Macdonald, leaning against the wall, looked at her and wondered.

She was young and very slender; eminently graceful; her hands were perfect; she had an oval, clear white face, a thin scarlet mouth, eyes narrow and brilliant, arched red brows and a quantity of red-blonde hair that hung damp and bright onto her shoulders.

Macdonald had never seen a woman of this make before; now he had her close and could study her at his ease, he found her grace and self-possession wonderful things. The sight of her hair as she shook it out to dry made his face cloud for a moment. "'Tis the Campbell color," he said.

She smiled over her shoulder. "I did not know that till

to-day," she answered. "Many of the Fraser's women have hair like this."

She took up the long curls in her white hand, and held them in the firelight where they glittered ruddy gold. Her green eyes surveyed him.

They looked at each other so a full minute — then he spoke.

"Why did you strike me when you rode past?"

She gave a sudden laugh.

"My whip slipped — I meant it for the horse," she said, "not for you, Macdonald of Glencoe — why should I?"

The thick peat smoke, that circled round the hut before it found the rude aperture that served as a chimney, made her cough and shudder.

"Where are we now?" she asked.

"By the entrance to Glenorchy," he answered, gazing hard at her.

"Ah," she said, "Jock Campbell's lands — his castle lies there, you said?"

She was leaning against the wall; her eyes indifferently on the smoke and flame; then suddenly she lifted them and Macdonald started; they were such a vivid color, green as those of a wildcat.

"You are bold to come so near Glenorchy when you have burnt Jock of Breadalbane's house," she smiled.

"He is in the Lowlands," Macdonald answered. "And I have said — no Campbell would follow where I go — to Glencoe — though Campbell of Breadalbane is serpent-cunning and very full of lies."

"You hate him very deeply?" she questioned.

His frank eyes flew wide.

"He is the loathed devil of all the Campbells," he cried, "surely you know that?"

She gave a little laugh.

"What are his qualities?" she asked. "Why do you hate him so?"

"Ask every soul in the Highlands or the Lowlands," he answered fiercely, "and if ye find one to say a good word for Jock Campbell — then will I tell ye of his qualities."

He came across the hut and stood towering over her.

"I do mistrust you," he said. "I think you are over quiet."

She drew herself a little closer against the wall, the green eyes glittered up at him.

"I think you are a Campbell," said Macdonald, breathing hard.

"By Christ, I am not," she answered resolutely. "Nor any friend of theirs."

There was a little pause, the heavy sweep of the rain without came distinctly, mournfully, and a low wind howled through the rough window.

Macdonald gazed into her eyes: she did not wince, but suddenly smiled; the color came into her cheeks.

"Ye have a wonderful face, Helen Fraser," he said. "Are you a princess of the clan?"

"I am Lord Fraser's daughter," she answered, "and heiress of our family."

"They should be proud of you," said Macdonald. "Are you a maid or wife?"

"I am unwed," she said, "and am ever like to be, for I do find it hard to love."

He turned away from her and pointed to the log.

"Will you sit?" he said with a grave courtesy.

She complied at once with a deepening of her smile.

In one corner was a pile of skins; Macdonald lifted these and brought out from under them two goblets of pure gold.

As he raised them he looked at the woman; she showed through the cloudy smoke brown and gold and brilliant; her hair was as vivid as the little tongues of flame she held her hands over.

"From the Campbells," he said, putting the goblets down, "and this from the King — in France."

He brought out a slender bottle of wine and stripped off the wicker covering.

"We keep these things hidden here," he explained, "so that when any cannot reach the Glen they may find food."

He turned over the skins and heather till he found a rough cake of grain. Helen Fraser rose and came up behind him.

"Are these your takings from the Campbells?" she asked, and picked the goblets up. They were very handsomely engraved with the arms of John Campbell, Earl of Breadalbane.

Macdonald lifted the glittering wine with an eager smile.

"We drink as royally as Jock Campbell with his Lowland luxuries," he cried. "This is King's wine."

She held out one of the goblets while he filled it and let the other drop.

He put his lips to it, then held it out to her with something like a challenge in his eyes.

"Drink with me, Helen Fraser."

She took it, drank, and gave it back to him with the same unmoved smile.

"Now we are pledged friends," he cried. "But wait — ye shall break bread with me — "

"I cannot eat," she said. "Believe me — I am sick with weariness."

He looked as her keenly over the brim of the brilliant wine-cup.

"Ye shall do it," he said. "I would be allied with thy clan."

He broke the bread and salt that to him formed a rite impossible to violate and gave it her with eager blue eyes on her face.

She took it slowly, afraid to show reluctance, and ate a little while he watched her closely.

Then he put one of the skins on the log and another under her feet, and stirred up the fire to give her warmth.

She had become very silent; she took his care with no thanks, passively, but all the while her jewel-like eyes were covertly studying him.

He came and sat opposite to her; his huge shadow dancing behind him. Between them lay her steaming red coat, the gold wine-cups, and the elegant French bottle, brilliant on the mud floor.

Outside the rain was coming down less heavily, but the wind had risen and they could hear the rocking of the fir-trees.

She spoke at last, in her quiet voice: "Do you go to the conference Breadalbane holds at Glenorchy?" she asked. "You know he calls the Highlands thither to treat of peace — and loyalty to the new King."

Macdonald laughed:

"And the gold he hath to buy us fills his own coffers — there will be no peace while Jock Campbell treats," he answered.

"But many great chiefs have gone," she said, "And the whole force of the new King is behind Breadalbane — "

"We may go," replied Macdonald. "But we will not take the oaths."

Another silence fell; she stirred the smoldering peat with her foot; he seemed to be utterly absorbed in watching her; she had taken his wild fancy most suddenly, most completely.

"I must go on," she said at last. "They will be searching for me."

She rose and put back her glittering hair.

"And I will go with you," said Macdonald, rising too.

She looked over her shoulder; seemed to hesitate, a drift of the peat smoke floated between them, through it he saw her face, white, calm, and her narrow, brilliant eyes.

She picked up her damp coat and hat.

"I can go alone if you will put me on my road to Loch Awe," she said. "It cannot be far."

"Too far for you alone," he cried. "You — surely you are afraid?"

Helen Fraser put on her coat and turned up the great collar before she answered.

"And are not you afraid to go any further through Jock Campbell's lands?"

He was stung by her poise and strangeness. "Helen Fraser, ye are mad to think to go alone!"

She had caught up her hat and very swiftly opened the rough door.

The first blast of the wind made her shudder, but she stepped out into the rain with a resolute carriage.

Her horse was tethered close under some fir-trees: his glittering harness was the only bright thing in the gloomy landscape; he lifted his head at sight of his mistress and she turned toward him.

But she was stopped by Macdonald's hand on her shoulder.

"Look about ye, Helen Fraser — and think if ye would go alone!"

She glanced at him and then about her; below them the river Orchy, tumbled through the ravine, about them the mountains towered into the mist, to either side were great broken spaces of heather, moss and bog; straight before them ran a strip of dirty white road that wound through the Glen of Orchy. Over all was the veil of the pitiless rain and the sound of the tossing fir-trees.

Helen Fraser, erect, bareheaded, looked on it unmoved.

"Where does that road lead?" she asked.

Macdonald's blue eyes flashed.

"To Castle Kilchurn — Jock Campbell's house," he answered. "Not your way — your kinsfolk can have no business there."

"No," she said, and coughed and shivered. She gave no sign of where she was going or upon what errand she and her clan were bound, and he, having broken bread with her, would not deign to question; she might be concerned in some of the intricate politics or feuds of the Highlands; he felt it no matter of his, but he also felt he would not lose sight of her so easily.

She spoke again, suddenly:

"I would rather go alone — I can find my way — I have been here before."

A great color came into Macdonald's face; he put his hands on her shoulders and turned her round so that she faced him.

"Why do you so loathe my company?" he demanded. "I am a prince."

She breathed a little heavily to feel him holding her — but her face was unmoved.

"I have a friendship for you and all the Macdonalds," she said.

"Well, prove it," he answered eagerly.

"Let go of me," she said a little unsteadily. "I have broken bread — and drunk with ye." She shook her head, tossing the damp red curls off her white forehead and her lips trembled a little.

"Let go of me," she repeated.

He looked at her steadily and smiled: "The witches of the mountains have brought us together, Helen Fraser — I shall find you again — and as a pledge — ye shall kiss me."

"I will not," she answered. "Take your hands away, Macdonald of Glencoe!"

But he held her gently against the mud walls of the hut; heedless of her shudder under his touch.

A great rowan-bush full of dull berries grew close; her scarlet dress pressed against the dripping leaves as she drew as far as she was able away from him.

"Ye shall — " he said simply. "Why not?"

She was still and quiet though she saw she was helpless.

"We are strangers," she said quickly.

"I would not have it so," he answered eagerly. "Through war or peace I would be a friend to thee and thine — and I would have thy kiss on it — so that there may never be feud between mine and thine — kiss me, Helen Fraser!"

She crushed further into the rowan-tree and gave one quick glance round the utter desolation.

"No!" she said. "No! I — "

But her words were stifled, for he had caught her up to him — and kissed her lightly, full on the mouth.

Like flames piercing ice a sudden passion flared from her calm; she called out something fiercely in the Lowland language that he could not understand, and wrenched away with the furious color in her face.

"A Macdonald's kiss will not harm ye!" he cried hotly, roused by her wrath.

At the sight of his face she controlled herself and set her lips.

"Ye have done what ye wished," she said unsteadily. "Put something between us that I shall remember." She was trembling; passionately clasping and unclasping her hands; he came toward her; she clutched at the reins of her horse and leaped into the saddle.

She flung on her hat, her eyes shone through the floating feather and hair; she had a perfect seat in the saddle; Macdonald noticed how gloriously she sat and how her proud look became her face.

"I am very glad to come with ye," he said, his fair face flushed. "I will not leave ye, Helen Fraser, until ye find your kinsfolk."

She had one hand in the pocket of her coat. Her green eyes were on him; she suddenly spurred her horse forward.

Macdonald taken by surprise, stood still a moment, then impulsively came after her. He saw her turn in the saddle with something glittering in her hand. The next second the report of a pistol rang out; a flash of fire through the rain.

Ronald Macdonald cried out and fell on his side, shot through the ankle.

A sweep of color came into her face as she saw his plaid prone on the heather; she thrust the smoking pistol into her holster and turned her horse's head down the white road that led to Castle Kilchurn.

CHAPTER III

JOCK O' BREADALBANE'S WIFE

LOCH AWE lay vast and gloomy under the gray skies; it was twilight and the sky burnt gold and purple with the last of the setting sun behind Castle Kilchurn. Though it no longer rained, great black clouds lay over the distant mountains and a thick mist hung over the placid water. The castle itself, standing huge and magnificent on the tongue of land that runs into the loch at the foot of Ben Cruachan, bore on the Gothic turrets the English standard: a symbol of the authority with which the government had invested the Earl of Breadalbane.

Along the road that wound by the edges of the loch to the castle, rode a woman in a scarlet cloak.

The vast expanse of cloudy sky, the huge outlines of misty mountains, the gloomy castle and the great storm-twisted fir-trees were all tinged with an air of awe and melancholy.

The woman and her bright brown horse were reflected among the shadows of the broken clouds in the still water; she rode slowly with her face lifted to the flaring sky and her red hair blown back from her face.

There were lights in the windows of the Castle Kilchurn, and the outer gates stood open.

The horsewoman rode through and up to the great entrance, where she alighted. Before she had time to knock,

four or five servants came hurrying across the courtyard to take her horse, and the door was flung wide.

She silently entered the vast stone hall, and looked about her; a couple of white hounds came running up to her; a gray-haired butler stepped forward. She asked him in Saxon:

"Is my lord here yet?"

"Nay, my lady; he is looking for your ladyship, when he found ye were missing, he returned to find ye, my lady."

"Let one go after him," she answered, "to say I am arrived — is my cousin, Colin, here?"

"Yea, my lady; and all the other gentlemen."

She flung off her damp coat and ascended the great, bare unfurnished stairs.

On the first landing she came into a glare of light that fell through an open door; servants were passing to and fro, and there was the sound of many voices.

She entered; stood in the doorway looking down the room.

It had been the dining-hall of the old castle; it was a large room with tapestry on the walls and a huge log fire burning on the hearth.

Round the black oak table a party of gentlemen were dining by the light of a hundred candles. At sight of the woman in the doorway they all rose with one exclamation:

"The Countess Peggy!"

She came down the room smiling.

"Ye did expect I had fed the eagles by now?" she asked. "Weel, I'll no be saying but I was fearfu' of it mysel' — welcome to Kilchurn, gentlemen — gude even to ye, Colin."

She held out her hand to the gentleman at the head of the table and took her place beside him, while the others reseated themselves.

"So my lord wanders on the mountains searching for me?" she said. "And ye'll no be having a great opinion of my wits for getting lost."

The green eyes glanced round; some ten men were seated there; all fair-haired, unmistakably of one race, her own, Campbells with keen faces.

"I was no greatly fearing for ye," said her cousin, Colin Campbell of Ardkinglass. "Ye will be knowing these parts vera weel, I thought ye could find your way to Kilchurn."

The Countess Peggy laughed.

"Weel, I'm blithe to be out of the mist and wet," she said. "Albeit I have gotten a great cold."

"Ye didna' come in with any of the murdering Hielandmen?" asked one of the gentlemen.

The Countess poured out some wine and drank it before she answered.

"Yea — I was put on my way by one of the Glencoe men."

A murmur ran round the table.

"Macdonald o' Glencoe!"

Lady Breadalbane's green eyes flashed: "Ay," she said. "He'd been thieving an' murdering — burning one of my lord's houses, he said. He showed me Campbells rotting on the trees and — "

She checked herself abruptly; her keen glance roved round the grim Campbell faces. "I think we've taken enough from these Macdonalds of Glencoe," she said slowly.

There was a little deadly pause; it was not easy for a Campbell to voice his feelings for a Macdonald.

It was the Countess who spoke first: "They're vera simple, these savages; I told him I was a Fraser."

"It was wise," remarked her cousin dryly. "If he had kenned ye were Breadalbane's wife, weel, ye wouldna' be here noo."

"Indeed, they do hate my lord," she answered. "I had to listen to some miscalling of Jock Campbell — as they name him." Her thin lips curled into a bitter smile. "I tried to sound him about this conference — ye ken — this matter my lord has on hand for quieting the Hielands — 'we'll never take the oaths' — he says — 'Jock Campbell's got the money in his coffers for himsel' — we may come,' he says, 'but we'll enter into no treaty with a Campbell.' "

"Puir fules," said one of the company. "They think we *want* them to be taking the oaths to King William?"

"They're no' so simple as that," answered another. "But they consider the new government'll need something for its money — an' if a Campbell can't quiet the Hielands — some one else can try — it's plain they're bent on ruining the negotiations out of spite to Breadalbane."

The Countess Peggy set her wine-glass down fiercely: "Weel," she said, "'tis the end of October noo, an' they must take the oaths by January — they've been dallying for two years — but I'm no' thinking either we or the government will be taking any more."

"Lochiel and Glengarry show signs of yielding," said Colin Campbell, "though they demand, ye ken, too much of the money — and Coll a' the Cows, the ould murdering thief, he'll come in to save his ugly neck — but Macdonald of Glencoe will na'."

"I dinna think we shall be troubled as how to treat them," answered another. "They'll be rebels — it'll be a fine chance to be clearing the country of a den of thieves."

The Countess Peggy's eyes flashed at the speaker a meaning look.

"My lord'll be equal to them," she smiled.

In their hearts they all assented; they knew the Earl of Breadalbane, ruthless and cunning even for a Campbell; of a fine ability and a power that made him next to his cousin Argyll, the master of the Highlands; and these kinsmen of his, a body-guard of Campbells kept always about him, regarded him with a respect that only great cunning, great falseness and great power could have engendered in their shrewd souls.

Dinner over, they rose; they had come from Edinburgh that day and were mostly weary.

The Countess Peggy, whose masterful spirit they obeyed, dismissed them.

She was going to wait up for the Earl, she said, and needed no company.

It was hardly late yet; but the Campbells were never of a roistering spirit; most of them went to bed; the Countess waited alone in the dining-hall.

It was full of the mellow light of candles and the bright glow of the fire; the arms and trophies of the chase on the tapestried walls glittered in points of light.

She seated herself in a large oak chair that almost concealed her slender figure; her buckle shoes were held out to the blaze; her fine, thin face was outlined against the ruby head cushion; she sighed, finding herself tired.

One of the boar-hounds had found its way in and lay by her side; her long white hand hung idly down and caressed his silky ears; all her movements were very graceful; her body as supple as her face was unmoved and hard.

The heavy clock in the corner had struck ten, but she gave

no sign of impatience; her lids drooped over her brilliant eyes, though her firm, thin mouth was unrelaxed.

It struck the half-hour. She looked round; the table was set, nothing was wanting for her husband's welcome; she lapsed into musing again.

Presently she started into alertness; there was a sound without; the door opened suddenly.

"Jock!" she cried and sprang up.

A slight gentleman in a shining cuirass stood in the doorway.

In a second the dog was at his side and the woman half way down the room with out-held hands to meet him.

"Jock!" she said again; the change in her was wonderful; she flushed into an animated color, all hardness left her face; with sparkling eyes and parted lips she came to him.

"Weel," he smiled, "I didna' think ye would be lost on your own Hielands." He stooped and kissed her; then with a sudden half-laugh to hide the unsteadiness in his voice:

"Ye gave me a bitter moment, Peggy, when I found ye had missed us."

" 'Twas the mist!" she cried. "I dropped my whip and turned back for it — then the mist thickened; ah, my dear, ye canna ken how lonesome I felt alone in the wild hills."

She trembled; her overwrought control leaving her at sight of him; he led her to the table and drew her down beside him; he was more relieved at sight of her safe in Kilchurn than he would have cared to put into words, and it was with a sigh of relief that she looked at him; she had had disturbing visions of the wild Macdonalds meeting the hated Breadalbane.

She sank on a little stool beside him while he eat his supper, with her green eyes, very soft now, on his face.

He was a man of a remarkable appearance; of a very elegant build and upright carriage, though barely of the middle height; his face was thin and hollow in the cheeks, his lower jaw projecting gave him a sinister expression; his nose, a high aquiline, his eyes large, light gray and very restless; his thick brown hair of a blond so pale that it appeared gray.

There was an air of great delicacy and dignity about him; he smiled continually, but taken without the smile the face was hard and cruel.

When he looked at his wife, however, it entirely softened and his unpleasant eyes flashed into a passion that redeemed them as she caught his free hand and laid it against her cheek.

" 'Tis the last time I lose sight of ye when we cross the Hielands, Peggy," he said. "Did ye meet any ?"

"Yea," she answered under her breath; "a Macdonald o' Glencoe."

The Earl turned in his chair with a flash of steel and gold.

"One of those thieves !" he cried. "What did he do ?"

A deep color came into her face.

"He showed me the way," she said. "He showed me also Campbells he'd slain — he showed plunder from your house — he named you devil — and — "

"Ah, he didna' ken ye were a Campbell ?" asked Breadalbane.

"Why no, Jock — I told him I was a Fraser — I didna' desire to be murdered."

"Ye will have deceived him," remarked the Earl. "Ye are a bonnie liar, Peggy."

He gave the strange compliment in all sincerity and so she took it.

"But ye hav'na' heard the finish," she said. "Jock — will ye ever forgive me?"

She lifted eager glowing eyes and laid her hand on his arm.

Breadalbane put down his wine-glass.

"Weel?" he questioned. "Ye look ower serious, Peggy."

She gave a great shudder as at the remembrance of something loathly.

"I have broken bread with a Macdonald," she cried bitterly. "And — "

"Weel?" he insisted.

"And then — by force — he kissed me, Jock."

The Earl's hollow face flushed scarlet.

"A Macdonald o' Glencoe kissed ye!" he cried.

"Ay," she answered passionately. "But I dinna think he'll live to boast of it. I left him on the mountain, shot through the ankle."

"It should have been his heart," said Breadalbane grimly.

"Yes, I ken, but I couldna' — 'tis work for you, Jock, not for me — I just shot to prevent his following me — tis likely he'll die of hardship." She rose restlessly to her feet.

"I wish he hadna' kissed me," she cried. "A Macdonald o' Glencoe!"

Breadalbane's pale eyes flashed and narrowed, but he spoke quietly:

"The Macdonalds and I will come to issues yet, Peggy — and then — by Heaven! I shallna' forget this."

"Ah, I ken, Jock — but I would he hadna' kissed me."

Her face flushed and trembled; the Earl set his mouth dangerously as he marked her wrathful distress; he held his

hand out to her and she very passionately caught hold of it.

"We've taken enough from these Macdonalds," she cried. "I saw the plunder of a house of yours to-day — and murdered Campbells feeding the eagles — "

She swung round on him with tears gathering in her eyes: "Jock, ye are almost master in the Hielands; are ye going to leave this knot of thieves in your midst to harry and insult ye?"

"Nay," cried Breadalbane fiercely. "I'm only waiting, ye ken — ye canna touch the Glencoe men openly — ye might as weel try to hunt the eagles off Ben Cruachan as the Macdonalds out o' Glencoe — but if they dinna take the oaths —" He finished with one of his sudden smiles.

"Yea," said the Countess Peggy breathlessly. "Ye'll have the government behind ye then, they'll be rebels and proscribed men — ye'll have them in your hand, Jock. Ah, but do ye think they willna' take the oaths?"

Breadalbane drew her down beside him and kissed her flushed forehead.

"Dinna fear, Peggy; not ane of the Hielanders will take the oaths — or if Glengarry or Lochiel do, the Macdonalds willna'."

"Ah!" she took a deep breath. "And then ye will have the law to help ye."

"I shall get letters of fire and sword from the government," said Breadalbane, "and clear the Hielands of the Macdonalds."

There fell a little pause; the two utterly absorbed in themselves and each other did not notice or heed the falling fire and guttering candles or the lifting wail of the storm without.

The Countess spoke; under her breath:

"But at Edinburgh — in England, where they want the Hielands quiet — will they no demand an account of ye? — will they support ye?"

The room was growing cold; unconsciously she felt it and shivered, drawing closer to her husband.

"I have the most powerful man in Scotland behind me," said the Earl slowly. "And he has great weight in England — is a close friend of the King — and he is no' willing for the Hielands to take the oaths."

"Who do you mean?" she questioned eagerly.

A dying log on the hearth fell and broke into a shower of sparks; a gust of wind blew down the chimney.

"The Master of Stair," said Breadalbane. "Being the Secretary and a close friend of the King, he can do what he will with Scotland."

"Yet I do think he is the most hated man in the country," mused the Countess. "I did notice a fury of hate in Edinburgh against his father and him — he couldna' be more unpopular."

"I dinna care," smiled Breadalbane. "He has the power — and a fine ability. He wasna' for buying the Hielands. Put the money into powder and shot, he said — and now, when we've been dealing with them for two years in vain — he says the same."

"Weel, then," she cried. "All ye have to do is to wait till after the first day of January. Then get the letters of fire and sword — and the Master of Stair will support ye."

"Both he and his father," he answered. "Both the Dalrymples. If any take the oaths, weel, they'll be within the law — but, as the King said to Balcarras — let those who stay without the law, look to it — as they must expect to be left to the law."

He rose abruptly and crossed to the fire, where the last light from the glowing embers was reflected in his cuirass.

His wife followed him with shining eyes; it was the first time even she had so enjoyed his confidence; the first time he had so spoken of his affairs, though he had always been assured of her passionate sympathy. He fell into silence as he leaned against the heavy chimneypiece and she noticed that his delicate face had fallen into lines of weariness.

"Ye look tired, Jock," she said tenderly.

"Unlace me," he smiled. "This thing is heavy."

She came up and unstrapped his armor; as he shook himself free of it, he gave a sigh of relief.

"I shallna' need to be riding my own lands armed when the Macdonalds of Glencoe are — weel, treated as to their desserts," he remarked as he shook out his crumpled buff coat.

As she laid down his cuirass he spoke again:

"What was the name of this Macdonald to-day?" he asked quietly.

"Ronald — the chief's son he said," she answered.

Breadalbane yawned, then glanced with half-shut eyes at his sword hilt.

"Ronald, the son of Makian," he said — "maybe the laddie will live."

He glanced at his wife.

"Ronald, the son of Makian," he repeated. "Weel, a Campbell always has a vera gude memory."

CHAPTER IV

DELIA FEATHERSTONEHAUGH

IN a small chamber of a quiet house in Glasgow, a girl was standing at the window and looking down the empty street.

The November evening was closing in; the room somber and gloomy at any time, was in darkness save for the fire over which a young man sat, writing on a paper that he held on his knee. The firelight showed a resolute brown face, close-clipped brown hair and a large figure very plainly clad in a neat, dark cloth suit.

The scanty furniture consisted of a bureau, a few chairs, and a small table piled with papers.

"He is late, Perseus," said the girl in a tired voice. "It struck four some time since."

Both her accent and her face marked her as English; when the man glanced up it was easy to see he was her brother.

"He will come," he said quietly. "Why not?" And he fell to his busy writing again.

"Why not?" echoed the girl impatiently. "I think, Perseus, there are many reasons why a gentleman in King James's service may not cross England and Scotland in perfect safety."

"I have perfect confidence in Jerome Caryl," answered her brother, this time without an upward look. "A man who has been an adventurer all his life knows how to play the spy."

She let the curtain fall.

"I wish you would not use that word, Perseus," she said vexedly.

With a half-humorous sigh Sir Perseus Featherstonehaugh put aside the writing he could no longer see.

"My sweet Delia," he said. "We — Jerome, you, and I and all our friends represent a losing or a lost cause —"

"A rightful one," she put in.

"Certainly," he smiled, "but unfortunately at the present, a lost one — we are, my dear, without the law — in plain English, Jacobite spies dabbling in high treason — I want you to understand that, Delia."

His voice fell to gravity on the last words, but the girl bit her lip and tapped her foot impatiently.

"While we have King James's countenance we can never be spies — or guilty of treason in outwitting his enemies," she said impetuously.

"Nay," answered Sir Perseus, "but we may be hanged, my dear."

Delia Featherstonehaugh flung up her head: "And we may give the King again his kingdom," she smiled.

"God grant it," answered her brother gently, "but before we go any further — before we hear Jerome's news, before we make any more plans — I want you to see it as it is — Delia, we are staking our lives in the King's service."

"But you would not turn back!" she cried.

"Why, no," he answered. "But you are not bound to follow my fortunes."

Delia swept into the center of the room, her heavy satin dress rustling; a noble dim figure in the dusk.

"Are you not all I have, Perseus?" she said unsteadily. "Is it so long ago since father was slain by the Boyne and we

vowed to serve the King he died for ? Oh, my dear,why should you think I want to turn aside into placid safety ?"

"Delia !" Sir Perseus held out his hand, "'tis only that sometimes I think you do not see the danger —"

"Why, I do love it," she interrupted gaily. "The excitement is life to me — and you forget — are there so few faithful in England ? We are only two of thousands who plot, and wait and long for the rightful King again !"

With a little laugh she came behind him and put her hand on his shoulder, while she gazed over his head into the fire.

"Yea, we will do it," said Sir Perseus quietly. "We will oust the Dutchman, I think, Delia — there is a huge discontent everywhere." He tapped the papers he had been writing, "there — in my reports to his Majesty, I have to mention many great men who would welcome him back —" he smiled grimly. "Many of them, those who welcomed William —"

"If his Majesty would but himself come over," sighed Delia. "I think all England would rise to greet him !"

"Indeed," answered her brother, "William has no friend in England — I marvel he holds the throne — at all —"

"'Twill not be for long," cried Delia, with glittering eyes — "But — hark !"

A knock resounded through the empty house; Sir Perseus rose. "'Tis Jerome Caryl," he said.

His sister gave a little pant of suppressed excitement; the bold and restless spirit of Jerome Caryl was akin to her own; he was the soul of this plot in which she was engaged; of her own religion, her own views; a man whom next to her brother she admired of all others.

And for six months she had not seen him; the while he plotted in London, they plotted in Scotland; he might have

great news to tell; she was confident his fervor and ability could remove obstacles that to the slower mind of her brother seemed insurmountable.

Her fingers shaking, she lit the candles on the chimney-piece; as the pointed flames sprang up they showed the face of Delia; a strong face with great brown eyes and a passionate mouth; a low-browed fair face, very eager and bright with the thick hazel hair falling round the full, curved white throat and lace collar.

She caught up one of the candles and ran out on to the head of the stairs.

A man was coming up; she could hear the jingle of his spurs and the drag of his sword.

"Mr. Caryl!" she cried, leaning over the baluster.

He came now into the circle of the candle-light, a tall figure in steel and leather, with a long, dark traveling cloak over his shoulder.

"Himself, madam," he answered, and looked up with a smile.

She came running down the stairs to meet him and gave him her hand between laughing and crying.

"Oh, sir, Mr. Caryl — you have some news?" she panted.

He kissed her hand ceremoniously. "News of a kind, yes," he answered — "and you?"

"Oh, things go well in Scotland!" she cried, "but — enter — sir —"

He followed her into the room, and while the two men exchanged greetings she eagerly scanned the countenance of the new-comer.

Jerome Caryl had the figure as well as the dress of a soldier; a quiet, easy air, a soft voice and the face of a woman saint; a

face that seen alone none would have ever taken for that of a man, so perfect was the contour of the small, regular features, the sweet mouth, the straight nose, the dimpled chin, the large, soft, melancholy hazel eyes, the brilliant, smooth complexion.

Beside the rough blunt appearance of Sir Perseus, his face, pale with fatigue, looked like that of a musing girl; far more soft and sweet than the firm features of Delia Featherstonehaugh, all aglow with excitement.

"How go things in London?" asked Sir Perseus. "We have had few letters."

"It was not deemed safe to write," answered Jerome Caryl in his low melodious voice. "Pray, Mistress Delia — sit and hearken — I have dined — I am in want of nothing save the ear of my friends — yet — have you nothing to tell?"

Delia was stirring the fire into a blaze; she looked round with an eager smile.

"Perseus hath been much engaged," she said. "There is great discontent here — and the Highlands have not taken the oaths to the government —"

Perseus glanced affectionately at his sister. "Is she not a valiant plotter, Jerome?" he said. "Her spirits are enough to fire a losing cause — but have we told you — we have here in this house a Highlander — a Macdonald of Glencoe?" He laughed, but Jerome Caryl looked up puzzled.

"Was it well to trust one of those savages?" he asked.

Sir Perseus shrugged his shoulders.

"He knows naught of us — I found him some weeks ago half-dead upon the mountains; he had dragged himself, God knows how far, on a broken ankle, then fallen in a swoon. I could not leave him in that desolation — the horse I rode was stout: I brought him here."

A smile came on the smooth face of Jerome Caryl.

"Like you," he said, "and Miss Delia nursed him, I suppose?"

She answered quickly, not looking at him: "He is almost mended now — and wild to return — he is not, I think, very grateful."

"Gaelic is one of Delia's accomplishments," said Sir Perseus; "I do not understand a word the fellow says."

The subject did not appear to interest Jerome Caryl; he had weightier matters on his mind.

"What was you doing in the Highlands?" he asked Perseus.

"Why, I was gathering what information I could as to the submission of the clans — January first is the last day, you know, and not so far away."

Jerome tapped his foot thoughtfully.

"Breadalbane held a conference at Kilchurn, I heard," he remarked. "But it has come to nothing."

"Of course," said Sir Perseus dryly. "The government had the folly to send a Campbell — and the most hated of all the Campbells to treat."

"It was thought," answered Jerome, "that it would be to his interest to quiet the Highlands, but he has, I think, found it more to his interest to keep the money he was to buy them with."

"God knows," said Sir Perseus. "I think his strongest motive is not money — but hate."

Delia broke in eagerly: "You cannot guess how the Highlanders hate the Campbells, Mr. Caryl — this Macdonald goes white to think of them —"

Jerome Caryl lifted his head; his beautiful face was set and hard.

"Yes," he said quietly. "The Highlands hate Breadalbane — the Lowlands hate the Master of Stair; the English hate William of Orange — in each case 'tis thousands to one —"

Delia cried joyously:

"Surely that means all hearts turn to the true King — no government can surely live on hate!"

"Indeed," put in her brother, "I do think this seething discontent looks well for us — what do you say, Jerome? — the odds are against the Dutchman."

Jerome looked from one to the other, then gave a bitter little laugh.

"No!" he cried, "the odds are most mightily against King James — and even with the three kingdoms behind us we could do nothing against these men — nothing!"

He struck his hand vehemently on his sword-hilt.

"I have seen it — as I intrigued and waited and watched in London — while half the men of note would go over again to King James and the other half follow if he was here — while the people grumble and curse the Dutchman — while promises of anything may be had for the asking, still three men hold us in check — three men whom every one joins in loathing — but, by Heaven, they hold the three countries with a power we cannot shake!"

He stopped, flushed with the force of his words; Delia looked at him with surprised, indignant eyes; her brother spoke.

"What are these, Jerome?"

"William Carstairs, one; the Master of Stair, two, and three, William of Orange."

There was a little pause, then Delia made an impatient movement with her foot.

"Three men, Mr. Caryl!" she cried with flashing eyes. "Have we not many threes to match them?"

"Miss Delia," said Jerome Caryl, "you remember what the Irish said after the Boyne? — 'Change kings and we will fight it again' — I feel like that now."

"Oh, shame!" cried Delia.

"You seem turned rank Williamite," remarked Sir Perseus, a little sourly.

"I am not," was the firm answer, "but I see what a rope of sand we are without a leader: I see that we have to struggle against a man whose genius has made him arbitrator of Europe — and he has linked himself with William Carstairs —"

"A Scotch minister of no birth!" interrupted Delia.

"One of the cleverest men in the kingdom," said Jerome, "and the Master of Stair is another — if you consider the Highlands, you may add Breadalbane for a fourth — call them devils, if you will, but they are men impossible to defeat."

Sir Perseus rose impatiently:

"I think you are wrong, Jerome — why, Sir John Dalrymple, the Master of Stair, as you call him, hath roused such a storm against himself that he hardly dares to show himself in Edinburgh — any moment he might be arrested by the Parliament."

"Nevertheless," answered Jerome, "he holds Scotland in the hollow of his hand, he is a close friend of William of Orange, all powerful at St. James's, he is hand and glove with Breadalbane and Carstairs and his father, Sir James — curse him." He brought the last words out so fiercely that the others started.

"They defeat me at every turn, these men," he continued

passionately. "But, by God, they shall not get the Highlands!" He turned the soft face that was at variance with his speech toward Perseus. "That is the question of issue now," he said. "The Highlanders must take the oaths, the government decrees it."

"Ay," answered Sir Perseus, "and the government does not want the decree carried out. The government may, but the Master of Stair and Breadalbane have other plans — don't you see?"

"Yes," nodded Sir Perseus, "they want the Highlands to put themselves outside the law."

"So that you may quiet them forever with the cold steel," finished Jerome. "Breadalbane wants to wipe out the hated clans — the Master of Stair wants to exterminate this pariah race that harries the government — but we — we want to keep alive the Highlands for King James — and we will do it!"

"Then they must take the oaths?" whispered Delia breathlessly.

"And break them when need be," answered Jerome, "but they must take them — so that those who count upon their refusal may be defeated."

"The Master of Stair does not think they will?" asked Sir Perseus.

"No — nor yet Breadalbane — they count upon them refusing to take the oath a Campbell administers — they are waiting eagerly for the first of January — then — letters of fire and sword and war to the death in the Highlands."

"What can we do?" asked Delia eagerly.

Jerome Caryl lifted his intense eyes to her flushed face.

"Miss Delia — the Highlands must be warned of the vengeance preparing for them."

The girl nodded, with sparkling eyes; but Sir Perseus questioned:

"How?"

"That," answered Jerome Caryl, "is what I have come to consult with you about — after I had clearly seen the objects of these men there seemed but that one thing to do — to warn the Highlands and give them King James's permission to take the oaths."

"But —" said Sir Perseus, "do we not by that lose the support of the Highlands — if we should — as I hope to — organize a rising in Scotland?"

"No — a Highlander does not look on an oath as a sacred thing, my dear Perseus, 'tis said Breadalbane himself tells them to take Prince William's money to spend for King James — and under what possible pretext can we continue to ask them to hold out? The King's last gift was a few bottles of wine — let them take the thousands of the government and buy muskets with it for our use."

"Do you think," answered Sir Perseus — "that we can overcome the fierce hate of the Campbells? Will the clans submit to Breadalbane whatever we say?"

"If they are frightened enough," said Jerome. "If they realize that all England is behind him they will submit."

Delia broke in suddenly:

"And my Highlander shall take the warning," she cried. "He shall carry home this news."

Jerome looked up interested: "A Macdonald, did you say?"

"Ronald Macdonald," she answered, "and son of the chief of his clan."

"He may be trusted," said Sir Perseus, "for his very simplicity. He could take letters to Lochiel, Glengarry, Keppoch — I know not about his gratitude. He is, I think, faithful."

"I will answer for him," said Delia. "Indeed, I can assure you of his great honesty."

Jerome Caryl smiled.

"Why — you seem to know him very well, Miss Delia."

She answered his look with a straight glance. "I have talked to him — he has told me things of himself and his people."

"They come from Glencoe?"

"Yes," she answered. "In our tongue, you know, it is the Glen of Weeping — they call it so because of the mists that hang there day and night — 'tis an awful place in the heart of the Campbell country."

"And they are murdering thieves, are they not?" questioned Jerome.

Delia lifted her strong face, flushed rosy from the fire: "I think these Highlanders have other standards than ours," she said quietly. "They own stronger virtues and franker vices."

"The same," returned Jerome, "may be said of all savages, Miss Delia."

Sir Perseus interposed:

"But I think the fellow is to be trusted, and who but a born Highlander could traverse this chaotic country with safety and advantage?"

Jerome Caryl shrugged his shoulders and stirred the log on the hearth with the toe of his boot.

"Well, let the matter rest. Only the thing must be done if we are to defeat Breadalbane and the Master of Stair."

Sir Perseus laughed: "Why, I believe you dislike the Secretary as much as the Edinburgh mob do."

"I hate his power," answered Jerome. "The way he rules us all against our will — he and he only prevents Scotland returning to King James —"

"They do say he is accursed of a cursed family," said Delia. "There are horrid mysteries whispered of him — you have heard?"

"Yes, and I do not think them all vulgar spite — they are a dark race, these Dalrymples," answered Jerome.

There was a pause, then Delia spoke: "Have you ever seen him?" she asked.

"Once — in Edinburgh — he was riding an ash-colored horse; there was a great train of rabble at his heels, who hooted and pelted him — I did not see his face; he had his hat over his eyes and never looked back."

"He is used to being mobbed," said Sir Perseus; "they say that is why he left Edinburgh."

"I was of the mob," said Jerome Caryl fiercely, "and I said with the mob what I say now: damnation to the Master of Stair!"

CHAPTER V

THE FOLLY OF DELIA

DELIA FEATHERSTONEHAUGH shut the door on Jerome Caryl and her brother and began mounting the stairs of the quiet little house. She could hear the low murmur of the men's voices through the frail door and a fine pencil of yellow light fell between the paneling onto the blackness without. Delia stood still a moment in an attitude of hesitation, then went on lightly and swiftly.

At the top of the stairs she fumbled in the dark along the wall, found what she sought, a door-handle, turned it and entered. She was in a small room with a sloping roof and a deep bow-window; there was no light, but through this window poured a great flood of moonshine that showed the plaster walls, the simple wooden furniture and the figure of a man wrapped in a plaid, who leaned on his elbow at the window and gazed over the city.

The rough outline of his profile was clear against the square of cold blue sky, and above the housetops above him hung the great white moon.

Delia let the door slip into its latch with a click, and he turned his head.

"You are longing to be away," she said in her English Gaelic. "And why have you no light, Macdonald?"

"I have no need," he said mournfully.

Delia gave a nervous little laugh and came up to him.

"Why, you are well now," she said, "and will soon be free — you have no need to brood in the dark."

He shook his head gloomily.

"'Tis always dark to me," he answered. "I would I had died."

There was a soft stir of satin as Delia seated herself on a wooden stool beyond the patch of moonlight; out of the shadows came her hesitating voice.

"Do not talk so — we have a mission for you, my brother and I."

He made no answer, only dropped his head into his hand and stared at the moon. Delia locked her fingers together; she seemed to have to make an effort to speak, at last she told him of the discussion between her brother and Jerome Caryl, tried to put it forcibly and clearly and ended by offering him the mission of carrying the warning to the Highlands that they must take the oaths of submission to King William.

He listened as if she spoke of something of no importance; the names of the rival kings, of the Master of Stair, had clearly no meaning to him, but he flushed when she mentioned Breadalbane.

"The others may do what they will," he flung out, "but the Macdonalds of Glencoe will never submit to a Campbell."

Delia strove, somewhat falteringly, to show him the unreasonableness of this; presently he said drearily: "For the sake of your bread that I've eaten, I will do your errand."

A silence fell. Delia put her foot forward into the moonlight, and watched the long shadow it made; she shivered

once or twice for the room was cold. Ronald Macdonald seemed to have forgotten her the moment her voice ceased; she looked up at him and said, faintly:

"You promised to tell me before you left, Macdonald, the adventure that brought you to the plight my brother found you in."

That appeared to rouse him; he looked round sharply.

"Ye found me near to death, did ye not?" he demanded.

"You have been in great fever," she answered softly. "Yes, very sick."

"Ah!" He drew himself up in the window-seat and frowned reflectively. "I think she was a Campbell."

"Who?" asked Delia, a little breathlessly.

He did not heed her question. "She was like none I have ever seen," he went on. "I would have fought a clan for her — she wore a coat of the Saxon red, but she was of our country — a Campbell — was she a cursed Campbell?"

"Who was she?" said Delia again, still so faintly that he did not hear.

"Certainly she lied to me," he continued moodily. "And 'fair and false as a Campbell,' they say — she fooled me. I would I had killed her before I let her fool me."

It was the first time he had ever spoken of this mysterious woman. Delia fumbled in vain for the meaning.

"What was she like?" she asked.

He flushed and turned his frank eyes toward her.

"She had hair of the Campbell red, and curly like little oak leaves round her face; her eyes were like a wildcat's, that the light runs in and out of; her mouth was bright as blood, and her face white and sharp; she coughed and shivered, her voice was very cold. I kissed her and she would have killed me for it

— yet could it have been only that? — I think she was a Campbell."

He sat up and gazed earnestly into the shadows where Delia sat; his plaid had fallen back and showed the rough hide coat underneath and the strong lines of his bare throat. Delia laughed.

"Whoever she was I think you love her, Macdonald," she said.

"I want her," he answered simply. "I want to look at her again, to touch her, to hear her. If she is a Campbell I hate her — yet I want her — and I cannot rest for this desire."

Delia stood up; there was a gleam of satin as she moved, a quick rustle; she had her hands on her bosom and they rose and fell very quickly.

"Did she shoot you?" she asked.

"Yea," he answered. "Against the mist I saw her harness shine, and like the sun was her yellow hair,— she leaned from the saddle and fired — but I had kissed her." His breath came fast. He smiled. "I held her back against the rowan-tree, the berries all mingled with her fallen curls — I kissed her! She called out in your Southern tongue — then she said, "You have put that between us that I shall not forget," and her white lids dropped till her red lashes touched her cheek — and I . . . I cannot rest."

Delia Featherstonehaugh laughed as relief to the effect of the romantic wording of the soft tongue and the white coldness of the moonlight; she steadied herself with the thought of her brother and Jerome Caryl talking (very practically) below.

"You are free to go when you will, Macdonald," she said. "Only — if you will see my brother first and take his message to the clans."

She saw his eyes open, with a quick delight, she thought. He turned his face full toward her for the first time.

"I will do anything you wish," he said. "If I may go at once — to-night."

She stiffened and drew further away.

"Why not?" she answered. "You are well enough." Her manner was unnaturally cold, but he took no heed of her; she waited for her answer in vain. "Why not?" she repeated at length. "We only kept you here during your sickness, Macdonald."

Something in her tone seemed to ask for gratitude, the expression of some thankfulness for his life saved, but the inflection was too delicate for him to notice it.

"I will take your message," he repeated. "Only you must not ask us to take the oaths to a Campbell."

"Not to a Campbell," she said. "To the Prince's Government — but will you come and see my brother?"

Instinctive fear and dislike of the Southern struggled with the Macdonald's desire for freedom; he reflected a while, then gave a grave consent.

Delia, watching him, was quick to see that his impulse was to leave without a word, stride off with no backward look at the hated town. With her head held very stately high she preceded him down the stairs and flung open the parlor door.

The two men turned at her entrance. She made a little gesture toward Macdonald, and spoke in English.

"My Highlander — and he is so eager to leave us, Perseus, he would do anything — he will take your message."

Crossing to the fire, she seated herself, leaving Macdonald in the doorway. He eyed the two Saxons with frank interest; his glance rested long on the beautiful face of Jerome Caryl.

"I am to translate, Perseus," said Delia. "What do you want to say?"

Jerome looked at the huge Highlander with approval.

"Ask him to sit down," he said. "He looks honest."

Delia obeyed with an air almost of disdain; Jerome, glancing at her, wondered what had damped her eager spirits; she was very grave and pale; her eyes were fixed with a curious expression on Macdonald; her mouth had a little lift of scorn.

She sat so, very still, translating her brother's questions and explanations into Gaelic, and Jerome Caryl watched her.

Macdonald listened with gravity and attention, appeared to understand what was asked of him and received into his keeping the letters to the Highland chiefs with a solemn promise to deliver them.

Sir Perseus gave him a rough map of his route from Glasgow to Glencoe, a pistol and a few crowns.

These last he respected as useless; he was doubtful, too, of the pistol, but finally stuck it in his belt. Jerome Caryl offered to see him on his way beyond the town gates.

Macdonald declined, gazing from his high window he had marked the gates and could well find them. With cordialities on the part of Sir Perseus, and shy reserve from the Highlander, they took leave of each other.

"I will light you," said Delia.

She rose and took up a candle and led the way down-stairs; Ronald Macdonald, light-footed as a cat, followed.

In the narrow little hall she turned and faced him; in the circle of the candle-light her brown hair glittered with threads of gold and the yellow satin of her gown rippled into reflections and shadows.

"Maybe you will meet the lady with the red curls again," she said.

He looked curiously at the Saxon woman who had nursed him; his blue eyes held some wonder; he had hardly realized her as yet.

" 'Tis late to start on a journey," continued Delia; "dark already."

"Day and night are one to me," he answered.

"And you are very eager to be gone," she finished with a faint smile.

He looked at her half-hesitatingly.

"You have been very hospitable to one not of your race," he said slowly. "Beyond Dunblane, on the beginning of the Highlands, lives an old shepherd who knows me well — if you ever need me send to him and I shall hear."

She lifted her head.

"I shall ask for no gratitude, Macdonald," she said gravely and proudly. "Nor am I like to need you — I have my own kin."

A puzzled expression crossed his face.

"Your brother is a Saxon," he answered. "Most Saxons would have shot me where I lay."

Delia Featherstonehaugh smiled faintly:

"My brother is a gentleman."

"And I am a prince of the Macdonalds," said the Highlander, "and I can bring two hundred men to serve you when you will. They would give their lives to one who had given Ronald Macdonald his."

This sudden high-handed overpaying of what she had done at a moment when she was the most considering him ungrateful, brought a quick flush of shame into her cheeks.

"I pray you do not speak of it," she said faintly.

She was leaning against the wall and the candle shook so in her hand that her shadow waved and danced behind her on the paneling; she was very much aware of the nearness of his magnificent presence and the frank half-wonder of his blue eyes turned on her, though her own were very resolutely fixed upon her feet.

"Unbar the door," she asked him, "'tis too heavy for me."

He bent over the iron bolts; as he turned his back she glanced once up then down again.

There was a hoarse creaking and the door swung slowly open on the violet night; it was bitter cold; beneath the rising moon great masses of gray clouds lay piled, and a low stinging wind was abroad.

Macdonald stepped over the threshold and set his face toward the gates; a little wild smile crossed his face.

"Farewell," he said absently, and turned to leave.

A gust of wind blew out the candle and Delia let it drop; with a swish of skirts she came out into the cobbled road, her hair blown about her face.

"Macdonald," she said; he turned and gazed down at her; the moonlight lay on her from head to foot; she was pale and her eyes looked preternaturally large.

"Macdonald," she repeated, then seemed to fumble for her words, "Do you understand? — you must take the oaths." She laid her hand on the corner of his plaid with a timid eagerness that had its effect.

"We will go to Breadalbane's conference," he answered, "and if the others submit —"

"There must be no 'if'!" she cried impetuously. "Don't you see? Take the oaths or woe, woe to Glencoe! For the

Campbells will get letters of fire and sword against you, and the whole strength of England would be behind them!"

He appeared to suddenly give heed to some of the danger threatening; his serious face darkened.

"Maybe we will take the oaths —" he answered gloomily, "but not to Breadalbane."

"Lochiel, Glengarry and Keppoch will take them," she said eagerly. "Why not you?"

He turned on her fiercely: "Ye are Saxon! Ye cannot fathom! We hate the Campbells!"

He loosened his plaid almost roughly from her grasp and was gone at a swinging pace down the empty street.

Delia stood where he had left her; she put her loosened hair back and stared after him; she shivered yet did not know it was cold; a few houses off a flickering oil lamp hung across the street; she waited for the great figure to show beneath it, thinking perhaps he might look back since there he reached the turn of the road.

She saw him pass from the moonlight into the lamplight, then disappear into the dark shadow of the houses beyond. He had not turned his head, but with light and quickened pace had gone.

Delia Featherstonehaugh went into the house — shut the door and slowly mounted the stairs. She could hear her brother and Jerome Caryl talking in the parlor and the old woman who was their only servant moving about below; she avoided both and went straight to her own room.

It was a cheerless poor place; as Delia lit the lamp and looked round a vague, sick longing took her heart.

She had never known a home or wished for one; even when her father was alive they had been desperately poor and she

had alternated between a foreign convent and a Scotch lodging, according as the fortunes of her father's master, the Duke of York, had shifted.

There had been some little prosperity for them when the Duke, as King James, came to the throne; of that now nothing remained save the empty baronetcy that her brother now held and the memory of her father's death at the Boyne.

Yet she had been happy.

She went on her knees by her bed and buried her face in the pillows; it was strange to feel suddenly tired and lonely; she was half-frightened at the heaviness of her heart.

After a while she rose to her feet with a shudder between shame and fear; she felt restless, distracted, incapable of any continued thought.

She opened the door and looked out.

The house seemed quiet; she crept down-stairs and entered the parlor.

It was empty, but the light still burning. Delia, suddenly aware that she was numb with cold, drew a chair to the fire and held her hands to the flames. Sitting so, she fell into dreams and did not notice when the fire sank and died and the log fell into ashes at her feet; her thoughts were more real than the room; she suddenly called out at them aloud and clasped her hands passionately, then, startled at herself, looked round.

The other side of the hearth stood Jerome Caryl, his melancholy hazel eyes fixed on her.

"Mr. Caryl!" she cried and flushed scarlet.

His small mouth curved into a smile. "Forgive me," he said softly. "I startled you —"

She recovered herself with a half-laugh. "I thought you were

gone with Perseus — or abed," she said, "and I — I have let the fire out."

She spoke hurriedly and the color receding from her face, left her very white.

Jerome seated himself. "Miss Delia," he said, "this is a miserable life for you."

"Oh, no," she answered. "No."

"Yes," he insisted gently. "For a woman and a lady, a miserable life; you are very heroic, Miss Delia, to give up so much for King James."

"You forget, Mr. Caryl, that I have no alternative." She smiled frankly at him. "And I am a born plotter," she added, "and sanguine — so content, Mr. Caryl."

A silence fell between them; she turned her head away and fell to twisting her fingers together in her lap; he could see her profile in pure strong lines against the background of shadows, the curve of her throat into the lace collar and the loosened knot of dull brown curls in her neck; he studied her with gentle melancholy eyes and his mouth drooped with lines of musing. Presently the girl spoke, shaking off the spell of the silence with an effort.

"Mr. Caryl — do you think the Highlands will take the oath?"

"I hope so — most fervently," he answered. "Indeed, I think so —"

"All of them?" she asked, and her voice faltered a little.

Jerome Caryl considered.

"Some might hate the Campbells more than they feared the government," he said, "but it would, Miss Delia, hardly matter — they would pay the price — they could not involve the others."

"Pay the price," she repeated. "What would that be? — what would the government do to those who did not take the oaths?"

She turned full toward him with grave, intent eyes.

"'Tis not a question of the government," answered Caryl. "But of Breadalbane and the Master of Stair — they are waiting very eagerly, Miss Delia, for the first of January to pass, and they are preparing a great vengeance against those who shall then be outside the law."

"They would be pitiless, you think?" she questioned breathlessly.

"Yes," said Jerome Caryl.

She moved impetuously in her chair. "Why?" she asked, "I can understand Breadalbane — but why the Master of Stair? What has he against the Highlands?"

"The contempt of the statesman for the savage," Caryl answered with a half-smile. "The intolerant arrogance of the powerful against those who oppose him, and the haughty resolution of an imperious soul, Miss Delia."

"I loathe his make," she cried. "Hard and cruel — I have heard horrid tales of him — and how he is accursed — he is a fitting servant of William of Orange!"

The color had come into her face; she set her lips resolutely and flung up her head.

"Do you think that the Macdonalds of Glencoe will take the oaths?" she asked abruptly.

"I cannot tell," he answered gravely.

"And if they did not —" she stopped, then went on bravely. "They are in the heart of the Campbell country — I suppose — I mean, do you think — Breadalbane would — leave any alive?"

"Nay, I cannot tell," said Jerome Caryl, "I think it is not likely that he would forego this chance against his ancient enemies."

She rose up suddenly and her clasped hands fell apart and clenched at her sides.

"Ah!" she cried.

Then she caught his eyes on her and gave a faint laugh.

"Mr. Caryl," she began. She could get no further; her voice broke; she put her trembling hand to her mouth and stared down at him.

He rose.

"Miss Delia," he said gently, "what is it to you that the Macdonalds should take the oaths?"

The direct question threw her off her defenses; she gave him a terrified glance and sank into the chair, turning away her head.

"What is it to you?" he repeated softly.

Her voice came muffled over her shoulder: "Why, nothing — only — you see — I —"

He saw her shoulders heave, and bent over her. She was sobbing; he could see the tears glittering on her cheek; with a great effort she tried for control.

"I am tired — and excited, Mr. Caryl — don't heed me."

He stood still and silent, watching her, his soft mouth curved into a half-sad smile; the light from the flaring candle and his flickering shadow rose and fell over her, now obscuring, now revealing her bent head, and stooping shoulders.

" 'Tis nothing," she said, stifling her sobs.

"Miss Delia," said Jerome Caryl, "I think it is a great deal."

She suddenly broke down beyond concealment. "I think

my heart is broken," she whispered between passionate sobs "I think I am mad — oh, — I am ashamed! — ashamed!"

She struggled up, hiding her scarlet, tear-stained face.

"Think me mad," she whispered through her fingers, "and forget — I am ashamed — and most unhappy —"

She leaned her forehead against the chimneypiece and sobbed afresh; her yellow skirt trailed in the dead ashes on the hearth, and from head to foot she shuddered.

Jerome Caryl was neither discomposed nor confused; he surveyed her agitation with a tender calmness and his strange melancholy smile deepened.

"I think we can make the Macdonalds take the oaths, Miss Delia," he said, "as an old friend you will let me help you — in what I can?"

She lifted her head and looked at him with a half-wonder.

"What do you mean?" she whispered.

His voice sank melodiously low.

"I mean I think you would not care, Miss Delia, for the man who has left us to be massacred by the Campbells — you would like to think he and his clan were safe."

Delia went white and clutched at the edge of the mantelpiece; she stared with widened eyes at the beautiful face of the man opposite.

"You know," she said at length, "you are very gallant with my folly, Mr. Caryl."

"My sweet friend," he answered, "your folly is a lovely thing — this man is honored by your consideration and I by leave to help you — you have a tenderness toward the life you saved; believe me it does you credit."

A look of relief crossed her face, she gave a little gasping sigh.

"You are generous," she said falteringly, "and I foolish — and ashamed —"

"I have seen strange things in an adventurer's career, Miss Delia," he smiled, "but never any one ashamed with no cause."

She stood abashed, yet comforted; gratitude that he had not guessed and fear that he might struggled together at her heart; she resolved on escape.

"Good-night," she said, and held out her hand.

His cool, firm palm touched her trembling hot fingers; she gave him a wistful look.

"Thank you — Jerome," she said, and with a sweep of skirts was gone.

He noted the way she gave him his name as a great mark of confidence, and smiled quietly.

"So she is in love with that Highlander," he said to himself, "and thinks her heart broken!"

He shrugged his shoulders; then yawned and picked the candle up.

"Perseus is remarkably obtuse," he reflected. "Poor lady!" And he yawned again.

CHAPTER VI

HATE MEETS HATE

THE Earl of Breadalbane bit his pen and stared thoughtfully out of the window at the gloomy shores of Loch Awe.

He sat in a small chamber contrived by a modern architect out of one of the Gothic halls of the old castle; it was well furnished and contained the luxuries (rare in the Highlands), of a carpet, wall-hangings and a sideboard with a mirror.

These things, however, were none of them new; the Earl's chair showed the horsehair through the broken leather and the carpet in front of his bureau was worn threadbare; the Earl was a wealthy man and a proud, but above everything prudent; he kept his French furniture for Edinburgh and used here things that had served when he was merely Sir John Campbell of Glenorchy.

A sheet of paper was before him; clear save for the heading: "To Sir John Dalrymple, Master of Stair." The Earl was very clear as to what he wished to write to the Secretary; it was merely to inform him that there was little likelihood of many of the clans coming in by the prescribed time; to advise him that the new regiment of his cousin, Argyll, should be armed and quartered in Glasgow with as little disturbance as possible.

But it was not so easy to couch this in terms satisfactory

to his own cautious mind; it must be in his own hand, his name attached; there must be possibility of a perfectly innocent construing of it if ever it were produced.

Breadalbane had often raised his eyebrows of late at the letters the Master of Stair put his hand to; the utterly reckless letters of a man too powerful to heed caution.

"But times change," smiled Breadalbane, "he'd no' be so powerful if there was a revolution." He opened a drawer and pulled out a packet of the Master of Stair's letters; written mostly from Kensington and in a powerful, picturesque style, flowing and eloquent. They set forth a scheme evidently very passionately dear to the writer's heart, namely, the utter destruction of that "damnable den of thieves," the Highlanders.

Breadalbane took up the last and read it over again; it contained these words:

"Your troops will destroy entirely the country of Lochaber, Lochiel's lands, Keppoch's, Glengarry's and Glencoe's. Your power shall be large enough. I hope the soldiers will not trouble the government with prisoners."

The Earl folded and put the letters away. "You are very confident, Sir John," he reflected, "that the clans will no' be coming in."

It was now the third of December and none had taken the oaths; there seemed fair ground for the Master of Stair's eager hope that none would; who was to warn the remote Highlands of the secret vengeance preparing against them; of the soldiers sent quietly in readiness for the first day of the new year, of the Master of Stair, Secretary and Prime Minister for Scotland, waiting for that day with the terrible calmness of a black resolve?

The Highlanders saw none of this; only the suave smile of the loathed Campbell who was the government's instrument, and a demand for the avowal of submission their haughtiness would not stoop to grant.

Breadalbane put down his pen and pushed his chair back.

If the chiefs were not warned. . . .

His light eyes glistened unpleasantly — certainly he had at least the Macdonalds in his hand.

He was returning to his letter with a smile on his thin lips when the door was suddenly opened and he swung round with his swift silent movement.

It was Campbell of Ardkinglass.

"Weel?" demanded the Earl, and his tone was haughty: his common usage.

Ardkinglass gave him a strange glance. "Macdonald o' Glencoe is below," he said dryly. "The chief and his twa sons asking for ye."

Breadalbane rose stiffly:

"Macdonald o' Glencoe — under my roof?" he said with narrowing eyes.

Ardkinglass nodded.

"They will be wishing to take the oaths," he answered. "They've come to attend the conference."

The Earl, always mindful of his dignity before his henchmen, stifled a fierce oath. "I'm no' a sheriff," he said. "Let them begone from my roof — see to it Ardkinglass — tell them I willna' treat with thieves."

"They willna' gang," replied Campbell of Ardkinglass, "they've come, they say, for their share of the bonnie English siller."

The Earl's control broke at that; he cried out passionately:

"The auld leeing thief! He would be asking me for the siller when he owes me more for rent and robbery than his share twice ower!"

"I think they will be coming to see ye in your public capacity," was the answer. "They're no' taking heed of private feuds."

Breadalbane stood silent; the angry color fled from his face and it took on lines of cunning; his eyes shifted under their blond brows; he stroked his chin with his delicate hand and coughed musingly; then he glanced up with a return of his perpetual smile.

"Weel," he said, "I'll come, Ardkinglass." He turned and carefully locked away his papers; then preceded his kinsman down the great gaunt stairs.

The Macdonalds stood in the center of the vast dining-hall, the old chief between his two sons; all three erect with their bonnets in their hands, all huge in height and build.

The two young men were breathing hard, flushed and defiant, their eyes roving quickly from door to window; but the elder Makian's fine old face showed a dignified, placid calm in keeping with his venerable appearance, a benevolent good-will showed in his bright blue eyes and his lips were curved to a kindly smile.

Breadalbane, entering, gave him a quick glance, then stepped forward, motioning to Ardkinglass to stand back against the wall. The two young men swung round, black with mistrust, but Makian spoke in bland Lowland Scotch:

"Ye will be wondering, why we make such a tardy appearance," he remarked gently, "weel, it was the weather — was ower rough."

His manner utterly waived all thought of offense between

them; he spoke as if the Campbells and Macdonalds had been friends for centuries.

Breadalbane hitched his sword over his hip so that it lay nearer his hand. "Weel," he answered thoughtfully, "I'll no' be denying that I was expecting Makian, though 'tis ower long since a Macdonald came to Kilchurn."

Makian waved his hand courteously as if he dismissed even the hint of an unpleasant subject. "Ye will be guessing our errand?" he said suavely.

There was the sightest pause; Breadalbane measured the three huge Highlanders in their dark tartans with their dirks stuck through their belts, and the Highlanders eyed the Earl, slender in his Lowland suit of gray velvet with his left hand gently pulling his sword backwards and forwards.

He was the first to speak:

"Yea," he said, "it will be aboot the coos ye have come, Macdonald."

Makian's face was a pleasant blank.

"The coos?" he repeated courteously.

Breadalbane lifted his ash-gray eyes with a sinister flash.

"The coos," he answered, "and the bonnie pasture lands — they have been keeping ye, Macdonald, this mony year, I ken — I willna' be mentioning the gould and siller, the plate and furniture and sic details — for I'm no' doubting ye have come to return the coos."

"I'm no' understanding," said Makian pleasantly. "We hav'na' ane coo in Glencoe." His two sons emphasized the statement with a scowl, but the Earl was imperturbable.

"Weel," he remarked, "ye eat a muckle of meat in a fortnight — it is only that time since ye took a hundred fat coos —

but I make no doubt that since ye have eaten them, Macdonald, ye have brought the siller to pay for them."

Again there was a slight pause; the venerable Makian's face assumed a still more amiable expression, but he appeared a little at a loss for an answer; the sons exchanged fierce glances.

Breadalbane, still fondling his sword-hilt, spoke slowly.

"The market value of the coos is twa pund English apiece."

At this one of the young Macdonalds broke out: "Ye play the fule, Jock Campbell! We hav'na' come to prate of coos — but of the oaths to King Wullie."

Breadalbane looked at him calmly.

"So you're thinking of taking the oaths? Weel, I'm no' a sheriff."

Makian interposed:

"We will gang to the sheriff, Jock Campbell, but there was talk of siller for those taking the oaths and I'd no' be adverse to my ain share."

"Weel?" said Breadalbane mildly.

"We'll no' be asking a muckle," said Makian generously. "King Jamie couldna' do more for us than fine words and a siller bawbee apiece — gie us twa hundred of King Wullie's money and we'll be taking the oaths."

"I take your meaning, Macdonald," answered Breadalbane. "The twa hundred pund would just pay for the coos — well, I'll keep it and then you'll be still owing me the rent."

Makian was silent, recognizing a master-stroke of cunning; Ronald had little Lowland speech and could only frown angrily; but Ian, his elder, made a step toward Breadalbane:

"We owe ye neither money nor friendship, Jock Campbell," he cried fiercely, "we come to ye because ye stand for the

government — we'll no' be considering what there is between us here and noo."

Breadalbane lifted his head with a little laugh. "Keep back," he said. "Dinna forget that I'm no' ane of your Hieland thieves, but Campbell o' Glenorchy and Breadalbane! Keep back, I say! Do ye ken that in Edinburgh the lifting of my finger would hang ye before the Tolbooth?"

His eyes shone with a steady contained hate, and fire flashed in Ian Macdonald's gaze to meet it.

"Na doot ye could lee awa' a mon's life in Edinburgh, Jock Campbell," he answered, "but noo we stand on our ain ground."

"Ye stand in Kilchurn Castle!" cried the Earl. "Dinna forget that, Macdonald!"

A passionate reply was on Ian's lips, but the old chief interposed:

"Ay, we stand in your ain castle, Jock Campbell, because we treat ye as the government's representative — in your public capacity, ye ken. I'll no' be saying it's greatly to our liking to treat with a Campbell, but I will be saying it'll no' be greatly to your credit to be remembering ye are a Campbell."

Breadalbane's hand clutched tightly round his sword-hilt; he struggled to maintain his wonted dignity of demeanor.

"Take the oaths an' ye will, Macdonald," he said. "But dinna think ye'll get ony siller frae me — not a bawbee. Ye owe me in money and kind mony times your share o' the English siller."

Makian drew himself up with stately gravity.

"Ye are wrong," he said. "'Tis not in your right to withhold the money."

"'Tis in my power," flashed Breadalbane. Ian answered fiercely:

"I fling your word of thief back at ye, Jock Campbell!"

He was striding forward when his brother and father caught him by either arm.

"We must have no fighting," cried Ronald in Gaelic. "There are a hundred Campbells here — woe that we ever came!"

Breadalbane, holding himself erect, smiled coldly at them; he had himself well under control; Makian glancing at his set face felt it had been a mistake to cross his threshold.

There was an intense pause; Ronald scowled till his blue eyes were hidden; the wily old chief with one hand tightly on Ian's arm was considering a means to conciliate or to outwit the Earl.

Breadalbane looked at the silent Ardkinglass behind him, then back at the three Highlanders and his lids drooped till his eyes were hidden.

The silence was broken by the opening of the heavy door, and the quick entry of a woman.

It was the Countess Peggy.

She wore a green coat and there was some heavy brown fur about her neck; she carried her hat in her hand and on her shoulders and in her red curls was a faint powdering of snow.

At sight of the three Highlanders she stepped back and the color rushed into her face. And Ronald had seen her; he turned full to where she stood and cried:

"Helen Fraser!"

The two Macdonalds stared at him; but he, breathing fast and flushing, took no heed of them; it was as if the mere

sight of her had uplifted him from all thought of aught beside.

The Earl came, very softly, nearer, but he made no attempt to interpose when Ronald strode up to the woman.

"Helen Fraser!" he cried passionately, "what do ye under a Campbell's roof? Ah, God, ye broke bread with me and I cannot forget — I forgive that ye turned on me, Helen Fraser."

She cut him short:

"I am Margaret Campbell," she said, very white, "and that man's wife." She pointed to Breadalbane with a smile of unutterable pride and before the glitter of her green eyes Ronald fell back.

"But — ye broke bread with me," he stammered like a stricken man — "and ye are — Jock Campbell's wife!" He glared round him with bewildered eyes: they were all silent, held in a tense hush. The Countess glanced at her husband, then back to the magnificent figure of Macdonald.

He stared at the Earl with wide eyes, stormy and inscrutable; he spoke very slowly: "So I have kissed Jock Campbell's wife!" and he laughed, as if there were tears in his voice.

The thing was done; with a sound like a rip of silk the Earl's sword was out and the light ran down the length of it before the eyes of the Macdonalds.

"Take the steel's welcome to Kilchurn!" he cried in their own language "Thieves and liars! do ye think Campbell o' Glenorchy is to be insulted in his own castle?"

In a second the Highland dirks were out and the Countess had cried to Ardkinglass: "Call my cousin, Colin — in the name of God haste!"

He dashed from the room and she flung herself forward, with eager eyes on her husband.

He had his back against the wall and was keeping Makian and his son at bay with the sweep of his long sword.

The sight drove the Countess wild: "Two to one!" she shrieked, "ye foul cowards!"

"Hold the woman back!" cried Makian; he had no scruples; what chance had they for their lives if the Campbells came? and Breadalbane was before the door. Ronald started at his father's voice.

"Bolt the door!" cried Ian; Ronald obeyed as if he knew not what he did.

The Countess dashed forward to stop him and a second time Makian cried:

"Hold the woman, Ronald!"

This time he turned and caught her by the arm and swung her, not ungently, back. Under his uplifted arm that held her she saw the crossing swords of her husband and Makian, and Ian standing grimly by; she saw Breadalbane hopelessly overmatched and her eyes flashed to the bolted door.

"Let me go," she said in a quick whisper, staring up into his grave troubled face. "Oh — take your hands away!"

But he held her as firmly against the castle wall as he had done against the mud hut; again her green eyes glanced in agony at her husband and she writhed in Ronald's grip:

"They'll kill him," she said hoarsely.

"And you love him?" said Macdonald in Gaelic.

For answer she, realizing him in a blaze of fury, struck him full across the face with her free hand; he flushed scarlet but never relaxed his hold of her.

There was the sound of steps without and a thundering on the door.

"Jock!" cried the Countess, "Jock!"

Breadalbane had been forced back into the window-seat; the huge figure of Ian almost hid him from her view; Ronald looked over his shoulder at them.

"Jock Campbell is doomed," he said gravely. "Answer me — do you want him saved?"

Even in that moment she was arrested by the serious passion of his face.

"Tell me," he insisted.

"What do you think!" she cried fiercely.

"Yes or no?" said Ronald.

With a wrench the answer came from her: "God in Heaven — yes!"

Instantly he loosed her and swung round on the fighting men; not too soon; the Earl had slipped by the wall and Ian was over him, forcing the sword from his grip; but Ronald caught him by the shoulder and dragged him back with a force that shot the dagger from his hand.

"Get up!" he shouted to Breadalbane; and the Earl, dizzy from the fear of death, staggered to his feet.

The hall was full of Campbells, the Countess had dashed to shoot back the bolt and Ardkinglass had rushed in with a dozen of his kin at his heels.

Makian, breathing hard, glanced round and saw the day lost for him; he had not gathered his son's action; but Ian turned on his brother with bitter curses.

"Are ye mad or traitor, Ronald, that ye give us to the hands of our enemies?"

The Earl pushed past him into the center of the room and

stood between the three Macdonalds, sullenly at bay, and the silent Campbells, waiting the signal for slaughter.

"Fool! fool! to come to Kilchurn Castle!" said Makian, then fell into silence.

"Will ye have us hang them as thieves?" asked Ardkinglass, "or shall we cut them down noo?"

Breadalbane pushed the blond hair back from his eyes, and glanced round his tacksmen. In the little pause that followed, Ian broke into a furious taunt: "Are ye turning tender, Jock Campbell? Dinna fear the odds — a Macdonald is worth sax Campbells!"

Down from the door came the Countess Peggy into the midst of the men; the brown fur on her bosom was unclasped and showed the tumbled lace of her tie; her red hair had fallen into twists of fine curls onto her shoulders; she was flushed and most beautiful.

"Kill them, Jock," she said.

She held out her hands, red-marked, round the wrist from Ronald's grip. "Kill them, Jock," she said again, and her gaze went straight and defiant to Ronald Macdonald.

Breadalbane did not answer her; he spoke to Makian.

"Your son gave me my life, Macdonald, and you're three against a hundred. I hav'na' need to crush ye by these means and I'll no' be under a debt to a Macdonald. Take your lives and gang."

The Countess made a fierce little sound under her breath: "Ah, no, Jock — kill them — while ye have the chance!"

"He saved my life," the Earl answered briefly, then to the Macdonalds, "leave Kilchurn, and remember I'm no' under a debt to ye."

They came slowly forward, showing little of their surprise

in their faces; Ronald's blue eyes were devouringly on the Countess; she drew herself up as he passed and her hand clutched into her furs.

"I wouldna' have let ye go," she cried bitterly, but Breadalbane turned on her:

"Woman, will ye no' remember, I'm master in my ain castle?"

She shrank into herself, submissive under the rebuke; but a hate not to be controlled flashed from her eyes.

"See them out of the castle, Ardkinglass," commanded the Earl, "see they gang at once. I'm no wishing to be robbed under my ain eyes."

Makian, afraid for his life, swallowed the insult and without a backward look or any salutation to the Earl, went heavily from the hall, his sons at his heels.

Ardkinglass and the Campbells followed.

Now they were alone, the Countess Peggy turned passionately to her husband.

"Ah, I thought I had died! ah, my ain love, Jock — why didna' ye kill them?" She caught up his hand and put her cheek to it with a little caressing movement.

He frowned at her absently and put his free hand to his sword-hilt.

"Jock, Jock," she cried, "ye had your chance — all the hate of these hundred years might hae been satisfied — ye shouldna' hae let them gang sae easily — that — Ronald — too," her eyes flashed as she said it, "escapes more lightly than if he'd kissed a Hieland wench against her will — is it for naething I am Campbell o' Glenorchy's wife? Ah, Jock, when ye drew your sword I thought ye had killed him for me — not let him live to — boast — "

Breadalbane turned impatiently.

"Ye dinna understand," he said, "he saved my life for one thing."

"Not for love o' ye," she interrupted fiercely, "but to win a smile frae me — an insult and a disgrace — if ye had killed him none had kenned he spared your life to please your wife!"

The Earl flushed a little at her tone, but he was lapsing into his usual calm manner.

"Woman, ye dinna ken the larger issues," he said dryly. "If I had slain these Macdonalds how think ye it would hae sounded in Edinburgh? Sir John wouldna' hae thanked me for it; it would hae pleased nane but the Jacobites that hae been glad for this handle against me."

She moved a step away from him.

"Ah, ye hae grown too politic," she answered. "When I wed ye, ye wouldna' hae done sae — Campbell o' Glenorchy would hae fought for me nor been dared sae tamely by these thieving Macdonalds!"

Breadalbane looked at her calmly. "I willna' put myself outside the law when I may be avenged inside the law," he said. "In a while not three, but all o' the Macdonalds shall be in my power and without scandal can I use it — dinna ye understand?"

"But they will take the oaths," she answered.

"Not after this — they willna'," said the Earl, grimly

But the Countess Peggy was not appeased; she looked with a frown at the fading marks on her wrist and rebellion against her lord rose within her.

"I'm no' convinced," she said, half under her breath.

Breadalbane gave her a cold glance.

"Let a man judge o' a man's affairs," he said curtly, "I'm no' needing your advice on matters o' policy."

He turned to leave the room, but the Countess swung round and caught his coat.

"Nay, Jock," she cried, with tears in her eyes, "dinna leave me in anger — forgive me — 'tis only that I couldna' bear to think they should live to — to laugh at ye."

"I'm no' angry with ye, Peggy," smiled the Earl, "and for the Macdonalds — dinna fear; they willna' lang be troubling us."

CHAPTER VII

THE POISON OF THE KISS

THE three Macdonalds trudged in silence over the flat moors beyond Loch Awe. Behind them lay Kilchurn Castle, black against the vapors of Ben Cruachan, the mist-soaked standard of England hanging red and gold above it.

The heavy gray sky seemed to hang low enough to be touched with an uplifted arm; there was no wind; a few flakes of snow fell slowly. Makian walked a little ahead of his two sons, and reflected on the absolute failure of his attempt to wring money from Jock Campbell: it had been a bold attempt and there was little wonder that it had not succeeded. Whether they took the oaths or no, Makian was very sure that they would not get a guinea of the English money; it was a bitter wrong, he thought, that the government should have chosen for its agent a man with whom so many clans were at feud. He meant to take the oaths: the letters Ronald had delivered had frightened him as well as others; he was shrewd and wily; the tribes favorable to King William; the Frasers, the Macnaughtens and Grants had warned him that submission would be the wiser part.

He knew he would have his sons against him, their hate of the Campbells overweighed every consideration of prudence he could bring forward. He decided he would wait: there was time yet. Let some of the others come in first, let Keppoch of

Glenroy, Glengarry or Lochiel lend their pride before he lowered his.

Ian and Ronald followed him in silence; though Makian had condoned his son's saving of Breadalbane as a piece of prudence that had preserved their lives, Ian felt bitter about it and turned a sullen face on his father.

Ronald took no heed of any; his blue eyes were gazing blankly ahead; he walked in an absorbed gravity with his mouth set sternly.

They had crossed the moor and were entering a ravine between the hills, when Makian stopped, and looking back, motioned ahead.

A man on horseback with a following on foot was coming toward them.

They were near enough for the Macdonalds to distinguish the tartan of the Camerons, and the three lifted their bonnets as they drew close. The horseman raised his hat. He was a magnificent figure, bearing the dress and manners of a Lowlander, though about him was a Cameron plaid, and he spoke in pure Gaelic.

"Well met, Macdonald of Glencoe," he said, with a pleasant smile. "You come from Kilchurn?"

"Yes," frowned Makian. "And you, Ewen Cameron?"

The other laughed. "I go there," he answered. "A tacksman of yours brought me a letter from King James — I must thank ye for the warning it contained," he added. "I go now to twist what money I can wring out of my slippery cousin, Breadalbane."

"Will ye take the oaths?" demanded Ian Macdonald.

Sir Ewen Cameron of Lochiel laughed again, and patted the neck of his black horse. "It were the wiser thing

for ye to do," he said. "Will you not profit by your own warning?"

Ronald broke in:

"Nay, we will take no oaths to a Campbell."

Lochiel's sharp eyes traveled keenly over the three faces; his own fell to gravity.

"Why, you would play the fool," he said. "These letters are from Caryl, an accredited agent of King James, and His Majesty gives us leave to take the oath to the Dutchman — and to break it."

Ronald's face grew harder.

"It is no question of the kings — I'd see either of them hanged for a gold piece — it's a question of Jock Campbell of Breadalbane," he said sullenly.

Lochiel, bred in cities and used to courts, smiled at the young Highlander's unreasoning venom. "Ye have stubborn stuff there," he said to Makian. "But let me warn ye — take the oaths before it be too late."

Macdonald was flattered by the friendliness of so great a man, but was too proud to show it; and sore from his recent encounter with Breadalbane, spoke with an assurance he was far from feeling.

"I am not afraid," he said loftily. "I will consider about taking the oaths — and ye, Ewen Cameron, will ye be the *first* to come in?"

Lochiel drew himself up haughtily and his dark cheek flushed.

"Nay, 'tis a point of honor with me — I will not be the first," he answered. "But my tacksmen are free to do as they choose, and my tacksmen understand me. Farewell."

He touched his horse up and the Camerons moved on.

As Lochiel, haughty and splendid, passed the Macdonalds, he turned a little in the saddle and smiled in the winning way that had won King Charles's heart.

"I will not be the first, Macdonald o' Glencoe, for my honor's sake," he said. "But I would not be the last, for my head's sake — look to the warning."

His gloved hand touched his black horse, and the Camerons passed on over the wet moor toward Kilchurn.

Ronald scowled after him; Ian cursed impatiently, but Makian resolved that his prudence would do well to take the hint his pride had received ungraciously.

Before Lochiel was out of sight they were on their way again.

The snow began to fall faster; it was late afternoon and the light fading to a heavy grayness; against the hard color of the sky the flakes showed a dazzling white, and in the hollows of the rocks they began to lie in tiny drifts. Beside a narrow cave that looked full on the ravine, the Macdonalds halted.

In the shelter of an overhanging rock, Ian kindled with some difficulty a fire; and Makian produced provisions from his wallet, and laid them in silence before his sons.

Ronald sat over the thin smoky flames, morose and sullen; he pushed away the food offered with the back of his hand, and sat staring over the blank landscape, while the others ate. But he was not left long alone. Presently Ian, warmed with his food and forgetting his grievance, came and flung himself beside him. Ronald eyed him coldly, then turned his head away. He was desperately out of humor and had no care about the hiding of it.

Ian, in every respect the same to look on, save that he was darker, rougher in make and fiercer in manner, was yet of a

nature more simple, more easily pleased if as easily angered; secretly, he greatly admired his younger brother. He glanced over his shoulder at Makian, sitting placid in the mouth of the cave with blank blue eyes considering mischief, and spoke in a whisper to Ronald.

"Did ye mark Lochiel's coat?" he said eagerly. "With the gold braid on it — and his satin vest and gloves like the King? Lochiel's a great man."

Ronald gave no answer.

"And his sword," continued Ian. "An Andrea Ferrara with a basket hilt —"

"I did not mark it," answered Ronald without looking round, but Ian was not to be repulsed.

"Macdonald o' Keppoch has a red coat like that — of the fine cloth with gilt buttons — I saw it when I was in Glenroy — Keppoch got it when he sacked Inverary and he carries it about with him, valuing it greatly." His eyes shone with a fierce envy. "I would have a coat like that, and boots with buckles and fringes."

"Lochiel bought those clothes in King Charlie's time — they're years old," returned Ronald scornfully.

But Ian cast a wistful glance at his weather-stained plaid. "Glengarry has an Andrea Ferrara," he said, with eager blue eyes on his brother.

"Let him keep it," returned Ronald shortly. "I am content with my bow and my dirk."

"You are in an ill mood," said Ian. "I remember when ye could not sleep for longings such as these — and when ye found nothing o' wearing apparel in Jock Campbell's burning house ye raged extremely."

Ronald turned fiercely.

"Do not talk to me o' Jock Campbell!" he cried.

"Ye did not maybe mark how he was decked in satin and velvet like a woman," Ian interrupted.

"I had him under my sword — I had my hand on his wizened throat — when you, you fool, pulled me away. 'Tis you who, for shame, should not talk o' Jock Campbell!"

Ronald flushed and his eyes darkened.

"Why — 'for shame'?" he questioned hotly.

Ian flung up his head with a laugh.

"Because the woman cozened ye — it was not for any motives of prudence, but to please the woman that ye saved his life."

There was a little pause; peering through the gathering dusk Ian marked his brother's face grow white, and he laughed again, good-naturedly enough.

"Will ye deny it?" he asked. "And little thanks ye got — 'I would kill ye,' she said, and showed her teeth like a cat."

Ronald stared at him as if he had not heard. "Is it not an awful thing," he said very low, "that she should be Jock Campbell's wife?"

"Do ye care?" asked Ian incredulously. "'Tis an ordinary woman — and I like not green eyes; also she is false to her finger-tips — like a Campbell."

"Ah, yes," cried Ronald wildly, "she is false and doubly false. She has the trick of smiling when she lies — there is a poison in her breath that doth infect her kisses with a deadly sweetness, and in her eyes a witchcraft lurks to drive the blood too fast for bearing — I would that she or I were dead!"

A low wind was abroad; it blew the ice-cold snowflakes hissing into the lazy fire, and shook the tassels of the firs against the darkening trail of clouds.

Ian drew himself up in silence; Makian was asleep behind them, close wrapped in his plaid. It was too dark to see more than the outline of his figure.

The vast forms of the distant mountains were fast absorbed into the general grayness; it grew colder and a great sense of awe came with the dark as if an unseen presence whispered: "Hush!"

"I would be fighting," said Ronald suddenly through the dusk, "I would be in the press and sweep of arms, the lift and music of the battle-cries — or I would lie dead and careless of the eagles that pluck at my heart — smiling perhaps — not heedful of the pain that stabs there now!"

"But ye have had your fill o' fighting," said Ian, shuddering under the sting of the wind. "At Killicrankie — when Dundee died. I have need to repine, who stayed guarding Glencoe while ye fought."

Ronald's voice came in answer, melodiously.

"It was most glorious. My God! I would give ten years of peace for such another fight — but what mattered the victory? Dundee was slain." His voice fell to gloom. "I loved Dundee, though he was a Lowlander — this Saxon Caryl that I've told ye of: he had a face like his, a girl's face, always calm. I would have died for Dundee. He was a great gentleman, full of courtliness."

He rested his head on his hand and gazed sadly at the slow moving clouds.

"The day before the battle," he went on, "he called us to his tent: Keppoch, Glengarry, Lochiel and us — he was writing a letter to the Duke o' Gordon when we came in. 'How do ye spell the name o' yonder castle?' he asked; Lochiel told him. 'That's Castle Blair,' and he laughed and said he had little

learning. He told us his plans as he sealed his letter, and how we were to meet Mackay's men: he was very confident. 'I was not born to be forgotten,' he said smiling.

"There was a spy-glass on his table, a wonderful thing; as we left I asked leave to look at it and he showed me how it worked, most patient and most courteously.

"With the first daylight we were in our ranks; the mist hung over the pass like the standard o' the Highlands; we could see no further than each other, but we could hear the rattle o' the Lowland guns as they dragged them up the pass. They fired, and hideous was the sound of it. I saw a Cameron drop, close to Lochiel, and Glengarry wince from his place. We were new to the muskets, but we did what we might; the mist rose, but up the glen the cannon smoke rolled thick and white, we could not see. Once I looked up and saw the sky overhead was clear and blue; it seemed a strange thing and turned me giddy. The sun began to glitter down our muskets. Dundee came up at the head of his Lowland horse; he spoke to Lochiel and I saw him strain forward and look down the pass; then he gave the word. We threw down our plaids and Lochiel tossed his shoes aside; we gave the war-cry in a great shout. Up from the smoking glen came a shaking cheer in answer, and Lochiel laughed up at Dundee. 'The thing is done, my lord. Do men who are going to win shout so?'

"'Charge!' cried Dundee; there was a great flush on his face.

"We flung aside the muskets and were out with the dirks. I would have charged into the cannon's mouth for I felt immortal, but as I rushed I fell and the flying feet of the Macdonalds bruised me to the earth. I could not rise. I saw Dundee motion to his men, but they hesitated — the Lowland cowards hesitated.

"Dundee rose in the saddle; he lifted his hat and the sun glittered, very brightly, on his hair; from where I lay I shouted at the cowards behind him, then a cloud of smoke hid him. I struggled to my feet; the air was full of confusion and cries of victory; the Lowlanders were running like sheep. I saw the gunners struggling in the press, the standard o' Lochiel flying through the smoke, and, midst it all, Dundee's black horse dash riderless down the glen!"

Ronald stopped abruptly, with a shudder of excitement at the remembrance of that day. Ian, thrilled to forgetfulness of the cold and the dead fire, waited with eyes eager through the dark.

"One came up to me," continued Ronald, "and asked me for my plaid. 'Dundee is dying,' he said; I followed to where he lay. Dunfermline held him off the ground; they took my plaid and laid it under him to keep him off the heather.

"'How goes the day?' he asked faintly.

"Dunfermline answered, very white: 'Well, for King James, but I am sorry for ye, Jock.'

"'If 'tis well for the King, 'tis the less matter for me,' said Dundee, but there was an awful look in his eyes and I think he thought of his wife and the boy he had never seen. He did not speak again; I think he would not; he turned his face away and died as the victory shout rose up the glen.

"Dunfermline covered him with my plaid. 'The war is over, he said in a broken voice. 'Dundee is dead.'

"I helped to carry him to his grave, and I took his spy-glass from his sash; 'twas broken with his fall, but I kept it for rememberance. I loved Dundee. Would I lay with him in his nameless grave in Blair Athol!"

His voice sank miserably into silence, and there was no sound.

The clouds drifted apart over a snowy moon; there was a sense of utter desolation abroad, the cold peace of loneliness.

Ronald rose and walked away from his brother toward the moonlight with the wind cool on his face; he shook with a stormy agony and cried out low and passionately:

"Would I had died with Dundee before I had been poisoned with love o' thee, Margaret Campbell!"

CHAPTER VIII

MacCALLUM MORE

THE Countess Peggy sat in the drawing-room of her lord's handsome house in Edinburgh and measured out tea with a heavy rat-tailed spoon.

It was a fine chamber with smooth polished cream-colored walls and long French windows, hung with flowered curtains of a dull pink; the furniture, black and a little heavy, caught in its clear-cut Jacobean facets the light from the dozen candles in a silver stand that burnt over the tea-table. The Countess wore a purple gown with paniers and a fine lace kerchief fastened with diamonds on her bosom; a screen of drawn red silk stood between her and the fire and cast a glow over her face and neck, lay reflected, too, in the hollow of the shining white and pink cups.

There was a fragrant smell of tea and the gentle hiss of boiling water from the silver kettle; it was a comfortable room, a comfortable hour; the Countess's green eyes were soft with content like a soothed petted cat's before a fire.

Her one companion lay back lazily on a low settee and gazed, rather vacantly, into the fire; he was a slight man with a fretful weak face, pale eyes too full, and a thin irresolute mouth.

He was handsomely dressed, and for all his unprepossessing appearance, carried an air of high lineage, wealth, position and power.

The Countess finished mixing the tea, then glanced at the man opposite; there was impatience and a slow amused scorn in her eyes; she spoke and it was in the tone of one who speaks down to his hearer.

"Cousin," she said, "I am glad to be out of the Hielands — Kilchurn is ower damp and cold this weather."

She handed him his tea and he put out a feeble white hand to take it.

"Ye should pull it down," he said half-peevishly. "I canna ken how ye can live there — I'd as soon step in my grave as live in Inverary in the winter."

His accent was very slight; he had the speech of a man who had lived abroad and learned many tongues.

The Countess Peggy smiled.

"Ye are the first Argyll, cousin," she said, "who has disliked Inverary Castle, and as for pulling down Kilchurn, we're no' intending it. Jock is ower busy building up what the Macdonalds destroy."

Argyll drew closer to the fire, balancing his tea-cup with the anxiety of a man to whom a slop in the saucer would be a disaster.

"I'm weary of the name of Macdonald, cousin," he said. "I marvel Breadalbane hath let them gain such an upper hand; they should be hanged and done with."

"My lord — that consummation approaches," she answered, hardening, through her smile, at his implied slight to her husband. "'Tis no' the lack o' power but policy has held Jock's hand."

The Earl of Argyll lifted his eyes fretfully.

"Policy! Always this talk of policy! If it had na been for my father's 'policy' in joining Monmouth in '85,

he would na have lost his head or the Campbells the Hielands. . . . "

She interrupted.

"But the triumph o' your return, cousin, made full amends for your father's downfall."

He shrugged his shoulders, sipping his tea; he had the manner of a man with a grievance.

"Certainly I return to the Hielands, but what do I find?" he complained. "The Macdonalds overrunning everything, Campbells hanged at sight, my houses gone to ruin — long arrears of rent due and the Stewarts o' Appin, the Camerons, the Macnaughtens, and these cursed Macdonalds refusing to pay a farthing."

The Countess Peggy gave him a bright glance. "We have our chance noo," she said. "Our chance, Cousin Archibald, for our revenge." She offered him as she spoke a little glass dish of macaroons, and he carefully selected one not too sugared before he answered.

"We?" he questioned. "You and Breadalbane have little to complain of — I dinna call to mind any misfortune in your branch."

There was a note of bitterness in his voice; he could not forget that while he had been living in a Dutch garret his cousin Breadalbane had managed to keep even with every government and come out at the end with unimpaired estates and a title as good as his own.

The Countess understood this and smiled.

"Dinna forget that we are Campbells, too," she said. "And we hae had many wrongs frae the Hielands." She tilted the tea-urn with half-shut eyes — "Particularly the Macdonalds," she added.

Argyll looked at her a second.

"Does Breadalbane think they willna' come in?" he asked.

"Cousin, he is sure of it — vera few will."

"Ah!" Argyll gave a luxurious little sigh of satisfaction. "I thought so — I had orders to quarter my regiment at Dunblane — and quietly."

"Orders frae the Master of Stair?"

"Yes."

"He is at Kensington noo?" asked the Countess.

"Yes — he and Carstairs rule Scotland between them — the King gives no ear to any other."

"And he, the Master — is ane with Jock!" she said eagerly. "And there are only twa weeks more — cousin — I think the thing is done."

Some animation came into Argyll's languid eyes.

"Almost, I think so," he said. "Breadalbane goes to London soon?"

"He comes up frae Kilchurn to-morrow," she answered, "and will be ready to accompany ye to Court." Their eyes met.

"He will see the King?" asked Argyll.

"And the Master of Stair," she answered. "And 'twill be done. We shall come back to the Hielands in the new year. The plans are laid."

A little half-foolish smile crept round Argyll's weak mouth. "'Twill gratify me vastly to see those Hielanders swept out," he said.

"'Twill be a blow to the hopes of King James ye ken," remarked the Countess.

Argyll looked up quickly: "Ye think so?" he asked. He always showed a great respect for his cousin's opinion, consulted her and deferred to her in a way her husband

never did, and she despised him in proportion. "Ye think there is no hope for King James?" he asked again, half-anxiously.

She looked full at him and laughed. "Cousin, cousin," she cried. "Dinna gang ower far with the Jacks because I dinna imagine that there *is* much hope for King James."

He stared at her, went red and white, and his tea-cup danced in his hand.

"Madam!" he gasped.

Her look of amusement deepened.

"I ken vera weel," she said, "that ye are tampering with King James's agents — weel, cousin, we all do the same. A wise man will be keeping square with both sides."

Argyll, looking agitated and foolish, began to protest.

"Cousin, I assure ye that I have na engaged in any treasonable plots — "

She cut him short.

"Ye need no' be so cautious with me, Cousin Archibald."

He looked at her, half-reassured, but the memory of his grandfather's and his father's fate was strong within him. He spoke peevishly.

"Dinna talk so freely o' these dangerous subjects — I hav'na' a wish to be traveling to Holland again."

"Leave plotting alone then," she answered with flashing eyes; her lord, she thought, not this poltroon, should have been MacCallum More.

"I hav'na' been plotting," retorted the Earl angrily. "I was approached by an agent of James — Jerome Caryl — he had some great names — some great names — he spoke. . . ." His voice sank — "Of a rising in the spring — the French have offered troops and Berwick is coming over."

"And you?"

"Weel, I hedged — I spoke him fair, but I said nothing dangerous — mark ye, nothing dangerous."

His eyes wandered round the room furtively; he was eager to change the subject, a little afraid of this sharp wife of his cousin's.

"We're safe with either government," she said calmly. "I've heard of this rising — Jock will of course wait. There is nae hurry."

"No," assented Argyll, eager to reassure himself of the safety of his position. "And I dinna doubt that everybody has a finger in the plot. They say ye can count on one hand the men at Kensington who hav'na' regular letters from St. Germains."

"And who are those few, cousin?"

"Weel — they say Carstairs, Shrewsbury and the Master of Stair — but I'm thinking that's merely because they are more cunning than most."

The Countess laughed. At the same moment there was a tap on the door and as she looked up a servant entered.

"Captain Campbell of Glenlyon to see your ladyship."

"He is frae Kilchurn?" she asked.

"Yes, my lady."

"Bid him come in," she said, and as the door closed again she looked at her cousin.

"What has happened that Jock sends to me?"

Argyll trifled with his teaspoon in silence and looked at her with a lazy half-sneer, for she had risen with a changed face, and that any one should be troubled lest anything should happen to Breadalbane was to his cousin a most amusing thing.

Captain Campbell of Glenlyon entered and stood a moment abashed by the light, glowing room, the elegant lady all purple and gold; his master usually employed him on rougher work than carrying messages to his wife.

"My lord is weel?" asked the Countess swiftly.

"Vera weel, my lady," answered Glenlyon awkwardly.

The sneer on Argyll's face deepened.

"Will ye be closing the door after ye?" he asked sourly. "I'm in a fearful draught."

With nervous salutations, Glenlyon obeyed; he was a red-haired, florid man, obviously ill at ease in the presence of Argyll and the Countess. There was a little pause: the Earl, fretful at having his tea disturbed, pointedly ignored Glenlyon, who, after delivering his letter, stood uncomfortably by the door.

Erect and slender in the center of the room stood the Countess, the soft light glittering on the stiff folds of her silk gown. She broke the seal of the letter and with eager eyes glanced over it, her fair face anxious and absorbed. She had her back to Argyll, and he marked with a slow cold admiration the curve of her neck rising from the webs and blossoms of her d'Alençon lace kerchief and the long, fine, gleaming gold curls that fell over her shoulders; drooping against the soft turn of her cheek hung the brilliant in her ear: it winked with a thousand colors in the candle-light and trembled a little with the quick moving of her breath.

There was a silence in the cream-colored room. Glenlyon began to note the things about him with furtive red eyes, and cautiously shifted his feet from the edge of the pink carpet onto the polished boards.

Suddenly, the Countess looked up and turned to Argyll.

"Cousin," she cried, "the clans are coming in!"

The paper shook in her hand and her eyes flashed under lifted brows.

"Lochiel's tacksmen are taking the oaths by the hundreds, the Macphersons and the Frasers, the Munros and the Macleods are come in — " Her voice was sharp and angry. "'Tis most sudden — most unexpected!" she cried.

Argyll sat up in his chair, roused from his sneer. "And the Macdonalds o' Glencoe?" he asked.

"They hav'na' come in yet," she answered. "Nor yet Clanronald or Keppoch — but it looks ill that these should submit — Jock seems disturbed."

Argyll put down his tea-cup and rose. "They have been warned," he said.

Their eyes met.

"By whom?" asked the Countess.

Argyll shrugged his shoulders. "By some agent of King James."

"But how could any know?"

"'Tis their business," answered Argyll, "to discover these matters — of a certainty these men have been warned."

The Countess turned to Glenlyon.

"Captain Campbell, know ye more than is writ here?"

"No, my lady, my lord will be with ye to-morrow, and I've no' any knowledge. My lord didna' gie me aught but the message."

"Ye may gang, sir," she answered. "Thank ye for your service."

Glenlyon bowed himself from the room, and the Countess turned again to her letter.

"This will be a blow to the Master of Stair," said Argyll

"But it is no' *all* the clans hae come in," she answered quickly.

Argyll smiled.

"But the Master of Stair was reckoning on all, cousin." He drew a letter from his pocket and unfolded it. "See, the last he wrote me."

He pointed to a sentence and read it aloud.

" 'As I wrote to you formerly, if the rest are willing to concur, to pull down Glencoe's nest this winter, as the crows do — thus destroying him and his clan, 'twill be as fully acceptable as if he had come in. This answers all ends and satisfies those who complain of the King's too great gentleness.' Ye see," commented Argyll, "he is very bitter — he would like to sweep the Hielands wi' fire and sword. He wrote to me that if none came in — he hoped six thousand might be slain."

"But they hae come in!" cried the Countess impatiently. "Still — if the Macdonalds dinna — if we can be freed o' that nest o' murdering thieves, 'twill be somewhat — Keppoch too, and the ither chiefs may stand out."

Argyll put his letter back in his pocket.

"They must not take the oaths," he said peevishly. "If they do it must be suppressed — surely with the aid o' the Master o' Stair we can do that?"

"I dinna believe they will take them," answered the Countess. "They hate us too much and they think themselves ower safe in Glencoe."

"'Tis a fearfu' place to enter," said her cousin.

"But no' impossible ye ken — ye see — they could send the soldiers from Fort William — and I one side and Breadalbane the other — they would be in a trap."

He looked thoughtfully into the fire and fondled the arm of his chair with restless thin fingers.

"There is ane person we have no' considered," he remarked, "the King."

"William o' Orange?" she questioned.

"Yes — ye ken he is no' a puppet King and has a fearfu' habit o' looking into his affairs himself — I'm no sure of his gude-will to our scheme."

She lifted her delicate shoulders scornfully.

"The Master o' Stair will manage him — he is deep in his confidence."

"Weel." Argyll looked at her doubtfully, "I have written to the Master o' Stair that I dinna do anything without the King's name as authority. I will na put my neck in jeopardy."

"The King's name!" She lifted her head with a superb contempt. "Who is king in the Hielands? Ye are MacCallum More — will ye defer to a foreigner who canna speak your tongue — who hasna' seen your country? By Heaven, I think the Campbells can rule in the Hielands without a Dutchman's warrant!"

"Breadalbane is no' o' that mind," sneered Argyll. "He took the oaths fast enow."

"But he dinna consult William o' Orange every time he wishes to hang a Macdonald," retorted the Countess.

But Argyll was obstinate.

"I willna' put my neck in jeopardy," he repeated. "Show me the King's name and I'm content — but I'll no' move without it."

The Countess Peggy's thin lips compressed scornfully. "Vera weel," she said. "The Master o' Stair will get the King's authority, cousin."

"You're ower fond o' quoting the Master o' Stair," said Argyll sourly; the news of the clans coming in had frightened his irresolute mind; he was ready to wash his hands of the whole affair.

"The Master o' Stair!" repeated the Countess. "Cousin, he is the most powerfu' man in the Lowlands, ye ken, and great in London — he is o' our views — cousin, I do weel to quote the Master o' Stair!"

CHAPTER IX

ON THE ROAD TO LONDON

IT was drawing toward the evening of December twentieth, along the smooth high road to Carlisle three travelers were riding swiftly, their faces toward England. The wind blew cold and keen; the trees bordering the roadside began to show dark and misshapen in the twilight; the walls of Carlisle ahead of them were a welcome sight.

Delia Featherstonehaugh, riding between her brother and Jerome Caryl, shuddering drew her hood closer round her face, and whipped her horse up to keep pace with her companions.

Through the dusk came Jerome Caryl's low musical voice; he was telling her the reason of this hasty departure for London; she had been loth to leave Scotland though, with the submission of the greater number of the Highland chiefs their work in the North had been accomplished.

"My Lord Berwick," Jerome was saying, "is come to England and lives now in a smuggler's hut on Romney Marsh — we have to see him about the rising in the spring. Then I have to sound the ministers and nobles and get what names I can to a letter promising help to King James — for you see, Miss Delia, the French do not desire to send aid if none will join them — then I have to meet an agent of His Majesty's — who comes with news from France — one, Andrew Wedderburn."

Delia made no answer, but her brother spoke.

"Who is that fellow, Jerome? We are getting too many into this plot."

"I have letters from my Lord Middleton assuring me of his perfect loyalty," answered Jerome. "He hath risked his life before on the King's service."

"A Scot?" asked Sir Perseus.

"Yes — by the name," smiled Jerome. "'Tis not he that troubles me, but this getting of signatures. Men are wary of signing papers, and lip promises are of no service."

They rode in silence a while; it began to snow and the light rapidly faded.

"'Tis a severe winter," said Delia. "I would we were in Carlisle."

She looked wistfully ahead, toward the city lost now in the gathering dusk.

Jerome Caryl, following out his thoughts, spoke again.

"I have Hamilton and Athol — I nearly had Argyll — but he is too fearful — Breadalbane is too cunning to commit himself — of course there are Montgomery and Crauford — and in England I am sure of Marlborough, Cornbury, Rochester and Godolphin — but I need others — there are the common names whose weight is little — whose honor is cheapened with much false swearing."

Delia responded to the disdain in his even voice:

"That there should be so many traitors!" she cried impulsively. "Sometimes I loathe them all."

From the dark figure at her side came her brother's practical voice.

"If you could get Devonshire, Halifax and Dorset, Jerome," he said, "it were enough. Shrewsbury, too . . ."

"Ah!" said Jerome softly. "Be careful — even on the open road."

Again they pressed on in silence; the snow fell thickly, their hands were numb upon the bridles, and Delia felt her limbs ache with col .

"We shall not reach Carlisle to-night," said Jerome suddenly. "You see those lights ahead, Perseus? 'tis an inn — I remember it; a rough place, but we will stop there."

Though Caryl was the younger, Perseus never questioned his right to command; his cold smiling way carried an authority not easy to dispute. In a few moments more they had drawn up at the inn, a low two-storeyed house; before it a heavy sign outlined now in snow, on it in straggling letters the legend:

"The Borderers."

A flickering lamp over the door gave a gusty light. As Jerome dismounted he saw a huge coach drawn up against the side of the house.

"Ye have guests?" he demanded of the ostler who came forward.

The man nodded. "A lord and his family."

Jerome hesitated, but to turn away now would look suspicious, and the night was impossible. He helped Delia down from the saddle and the three entered the low door.

A silent, depressed looking, slatternly woman showed them into a large room that was at once both kitchen and parlor. It was lit only by a huge fire that roared up the vast chimney; the floor was tiled in red, the walls, plaster; heavy red curtains before the windows shut out the night; kitchen utensils, mostly of brown earthenware, hung against the walls and were placed

about the hearth; a three-legged cauldron was in the fire and a heavy smell of cooking onions rose from it.

By the low dark table stood a lady, who looked up sharply at the new-comers.

She was a great contrast to her surroundings; her fur-lined coat lay on a chair beside her, but she still wore her large beaver hat, and in one hand she held a black muff; her gray velvet dress was open at the bosom on a full white bodice; her attitude was elegant and indolent, she rested against the table with her feet crossed daintily.

Perseus and his sister advanced at once to the fire, showing no heed of her, but Jerome Caryl remained in the doorway, loosening his cloak; as it slipped back from his shoulders to the ground, he removed his hat and the dim red light fell full upon his face and disordered hair.

The lady looked at him with a frank and slightly insolent admiration; her green eyes traveled consideringly over his tall figure, evidently noting his plain attire and the graceful way he wore it; she gave a quick glance at the two ordinary people by the fire, then stared again at the beautiful face of Jerome Caryl.

He gave her one look, grave and calm, from his melancholy hazel eyes, then ignored her obvious scrutiny.

"Perseus," he said quietly, "I must find the woman to know what accommodation she hath — will you come?"

They went from the room in silence, leaving Delia by the fire. She glanced with a timid friendliness at the stranger and chafed her numb hands together.

The lady looked at her, and to Delia the clear-cut white face with the green eyes and red lips was as sinister as it was lovely;

the cold expression prevented her from making any attempt to speak; but the other broke the silence.

"Was that gentleman your husband, madam?" she demanded.

"Oh, neither of them," smiled Delia.

"Your brother then?" asked the lady.

"One," answered Delia. "My brother and his friend, merely, madam. He in the red coat is my brother."

The other smiled.

"I hav'na' seen before sic a fair face on a man as your friend carries," she said. "Who are ye, mistress? I am Margaret Campbell o' Breadalbane."

Delia caught her breath; the position had become suddenly a perilous one, she reflected swiftly that her name was unknown, and gave it as frankly as she was able.

"Ah," said the Countess, "and your lovely friend?"

Delia collected herself with an effort.

"Your ladyship must ask him yourself," she answered. "I cannot rob him of that honor."

The Countess lifted her brows and accepted the rebuff.

"We no' intended to stay here," she remarked with an easy change of subject. "But the storm coming on and my lord havin' a weak chest that I should na wish him to catch cold on — we stopped at the first inn we came to."

So Breadalbane was with her! Delia's heart sank; she wished she could warn Jerome and her brother, but she was too confused to invent a decent excuse for leaving the room, and as she stood trying to collect herself to some definite plan of action the Countess crossed over to the fire and took off her hat.

"Canna we remove that vile brewis?" she said. "The smell will make my lord sick."

Delia gave a thin hysterical laugh.

"'Tis all there is in the house belike," she answered.

But the Countess Peggy's keen eyes had marked other food about the room, bacon, flour, fruit and fowls.

"Help me, mistress," she commanded, and laying delicate, resolute hands upon a cloth, she lifted off the pot and stood it on the hearth.

"Ah," she said with a disgusted face. "The place reeks."

Her hair had fallen over her face; she flung it back and Delia noticed dully how it curled round her temples in little red ringlets, then suddenly it seemed as if her blood stood still; the shock of discovery held her silent.

This was the woman Macdonald had spoken of; she knew it certainly and her fingers curled into her palm with hate. This woman — Lady Breadalbane! With angry eyes she watched the Countess, who all unconscious was moving about the room among the pots and pans; there could not be two women with such eyes and hair and lips, and it was a most likely thing that it should have been Breadalbane's wife riding by Glenorchy. The discovery nerved her; an angry desire to test this woman, to prove herself right, took hold of her; her fine face flushed and she lifted her head.

"Madam, your lord carries good news to London," she said on an impulse. "I heard all the clans had submitted."

The Countess turned with a slight smile.

"It is no' the truth," she said, "all hav'na'."

"Ah?" said Delia with her heart beating fast. "And who are the unhappy rebels?"

There was a little pause before Lady Breadalbane answered:

"The Macdonalds o' Glencoe for one. They have na' taken the oaths."

Delia saw the red and shadowy room spin round her and felt the blood hammering in her temples; before she left Glasgow she had been assured that the Macdonalds had come in with the other clans; she had never questioned it; it was such an unlikely thing they, of all, should remain obstinate; she moistened her lips and tried to frame some reply; she was saved by Jerome Caryl opening the door.

"I have engaged another chamber, Miss Delia," he said. "We need not intrude on you, my lady."

He inclined his head toward the Countess.

Delia felt a throb of relief to hear he had discovered the guest's quality, and hastened toward him.

"Hae ye seen my lord?" asked the Countess calmly.

"Yes, madam, he hath the only habitable room up-stairs," answered Jerome, "but he hath most generously surrendered it to Miss Delia."

The Countess smiled.

"We are well enough here," she said. "And ye may keep that untidy female awa' — I wait on my lord myself. We shall gang as soon as it is light."

With a few murmured words Delia followed Jerome into the opposite room, a dirty dingy place where Sir Perseus sat over a rough supper. She joined him in a white agitation and glanced from one man to another.

"Delia — what is the matter?" asked Sir Perseus. "This encounter will do us no harm."

She was silent, one hand over her bosom; with the other she pushed her plate aside; she was quite white.

"I know," she said faintly, "But I cannot eat — I will go to bed."

"That is folly," answered Sir Perseus curtly. Then he turned

to Jerome and added in a lowered voice: "Did you speak to the Earl?"

"Why not?" asked Jerome calmly. "I asked him for the room and he gave it me — cold and stiff but courteous. His wife is beautiful — is she not?"

They commenced their supper, but Delia sat miserably silent, with absent eyes. "The Macdonalds have not taken the oath," beat in her head. "The Macdonalds have not taken the oath!"

The hostess in clumsy hurry left the door ajar behind her, enough for them to see across the passage where in the doorway of the opposite room stood the Countess with her sleeves rolled up over her white elbows, and flour on her hands, her face was turned to the stairway, upon it a lovely smile.

Jerome fixed on her his mournful eyes, then, as he watched, Breadalbane crossed the passage and entered the room. The Countess closed the door.

"I saw a woman like that once — in a dream," said Jerome. "The face was strangely impressed on my mind."

Sir Perseus, eating lustily, asked:

"What was she doing in your dream?"

Jerome gave his grieving smile. "She was strangling me with a long lace tie," he said slowly.

Sir Perseus laughed, but Delia broke out passionately: "A cold Scotswoman! I loathe her — she *would* strangle you if it needed — her eyes are hard as stones."

"Delia!" cried Sir Perseus. "The place is overrun with Campbells — have a care — they have a whole body-guard of Highlanders at the back —"

"And yet she does servants' work," said Delia.

"She is devoted to him," answered Jerome.

"A strange thing!" flashed Delia.

"Nay — give her credit for her greatest virtue," he replied. "She would do anything for Breadalbane. I think he is very fortunate."

Delia bit her lip and dropped her eyes under Jerome's calm gaze; she was nervous, excited, almost beyond bearing; she rose up impatiently.

"Mr. Caryl — you told me the Macdonalds had taken the oath," she said with burning cheeks. "And she — this woman — told me they had not — and she should know."

Jerome turned in his chair to look on her.

"Why — 'tis not January yet," he said gently. "There is time — I have assurance from Lochiel that all the clans will take the oaths."

Sir Perseus put in curtly.

"And what matter for the Macdonalds if the others come in? They had their warning. . . ."

Delia moved round the room restlessly with her head lifted, her eyes fixed absently.

"Believe me," said Jerome softly, "we can do no more than we have."

"No, no," she answered hastily, " 'tis only it surprised me — they leave it late."

Jerome caught a questioning look on Sir Perseus's face and delicately changed the subject.

"I hope Wedderburn will not keep me waiting," he said in a low voice. "He was to cross from France and arrive at Romney on the twentieth — meet me in London at 'The Sleeping Queen' on Christmas Eve — where we shall stay — I told you — 'tis ostensibly an inn, but they have a secret press there."

"Ah — with Breadalbane in the next room — hush!" said Perseus anxiously.

"Breadalbane himself will be one of us before we have finished," smiled Jerome. "And besides I have faith in the walls — as I was saying, I can hardly proceed without these instructions from France, and I hope the storms will not delay Wedderburn."

As he spoke they heard the wind whistle and struggle at the ill-fitting windows and the snow falling down the chimney hiss into the fire.

"Dangerous weather for the packet to cross," whispered Delia.

"It has done it in worse," said Jerome. "And there is less fear of detection — government spies are not likely to be on Romney Marsh this time of the year."

Sir Perseus laughed.

"What fools the Dutchman is served with!" he said. "Think of the times that packet has run to and fro — think of the messages sent — the cargoes of Jacobites shipped — and no one has ever suspected —"

"Our agent, Hunt the smuggler, is trustworthy — and well-paid," answered Jerome. "And his hut is desolate enough."

Delia suddenly stopped by the table and caught up her untasted wine.

"God give us luck once more!" she said impulsively. "To the safety of King James's messenger!"

"Heaven preserve him," cried Sir Perseus, drinking.

His sister gave him a bright defiant glance.

"Him and the Macdonalds o' Glencoe!" she said a little wildly. "God preserve!"

"Amen!" said Jerome Caryl.

CHAPTER X

THE KING'S MESSENGER

IT was snowing fast over Romney Marsh; the whole wide, desolate fenland sweeping to the sea lay gray under the storm; it was near nightfall and almost dark; in the landscape one light burning brightly through the snowflakes; to judge by its steadiness it came from a window, by its size it was far-off.

There was the steady sound of the thud of the distant waves, now and then broken by the thin cry of the curlew or the hungry shriek of the sea-gull.

In the broken marsh-ground grew a group of withered trees; the foremost bent and blasted by lightning and against this one leaned a man wrapped in a long cloak.

He was looking toward the sea in an attitude, alert but easy; he appeared to be affected neither by his isolated position, the gloomy scene or the bitter storm; now and then he turned toward the distant light as if to assure himself it was still there, or moved to shake the snow off his shoulders and hat.

As it grew darker the snow began to cease over the sea, and the heavy sky broke into a patch of gloomy red and crimson; it was possible now to discern the dreary line of shore and sand and the dim form of the dark waves.

The man gazed round him, then made slowly toward the sea. The sodden earth and wide logs impeded him; he trod

cautiously, but for all his ease sank now and then to his ankles in mud or half-fell over the broken stones and boulders.

Slowly he made painful progress to the edge of the fen where it dipped in a sudden slope of clay straight onto the beach.

There halting he stared out to sea; the snow and the rising mist of the winter night hid all from him save the line of waves breaking on the wet sand; melancholy and terrible was the perfect loneliness; the watcher drew himself up and looked back at the light, then round again at the ghastly yellow sunset that seemed to be far distant; a mere slash of gloomy color in the mist and gray. Then suddenly he drew back; a little boat was pushing through the waves; he could hear the grind of the keel on the pebbles as is struck on the beach and a man leaped from it into the surf.

The man upon the shore watched him struggling up the beach, saw him turn and wave to his companion as the boat disappeared again into the mist, then advance as rapidly as he was able toward the ridge of the fen.

The sun faded to a mere stain; the mist drifted off the sea mingled with sleet and snow; the man on the beach drew nearer the other, all unconscious that any soul was watching him.

With labor and difficulty he threaded his way onward and up the shelving ledge, the other watching him the while as he drew nearer, nearer. Suddenly they met — face to face — a few yards apart; the new-comer stood motionless with surprise and his hand flew to his sword.

"For which King?" cried the man in waiting. His voice sounded strange and hollow through the damp silence; the new arrival drew a step nearer, searching the strange figure;

he was a slight, fair young man and showed a face white and strained.

"Which King?" he repeated, moistening his lips.

"Are there two?" came the answer from the folds of the heavy cloak. "I stand for King James."

"Ah!" with a sigh of relief the young man relaxed the tension of his attitude. "You were sent to meet me then?"

"Yes," said the other quietly, "to take your papers."

"My papers?" the new arrival again showed alarm. "I am to take them to London."

"I will take them to London."

"Sir, your authority?"

"The King's."

The messenger smiled, regaining his presence of mind.

"Sir, I pray you show it me — this is a strange request — I go to Hunt's hut; will you accompany me?"

"Yes — but first your papers."

The Jacobite laughed. "You grow peremptory — let me pass."

"I desire your papers."

"I will not part with them."

"It were wiser."

"Do you threaten me?"

"By God, yes!"

The King's messenger laughed again; his eyes blazed in a white face.

"William of Orange is ill-served in such clumsy knaves as you!" he cried.

"Give me the papers, damn you!"

"Do you think me a traitor?"

"By God — I know you a fool!"

"Stand out of my way!" and the messenger made a step forward, but the other seized him by the arm.

"Do you think," he cried fiercely, "that I am going to let you go? By Heaven — I have not waited here for nothing.".

The King's messenger wrenched himself free: "Spy — who betrayed us?" he burst forth, and he gave a wild glance round the desolate fen; the other seemed to read his thoughts.

"There is no ambush," he said scornfully, "'tis you and I alone. Who think you is the better man? Will you try issues with me?"

The King's messenger an instant studied his opponent; he saw a man of regal height and make, whose face was hidden by his drooping beaver and whose figure was shrouded in a heavy traveling cloak; a hopeless look crossed his face; he stepped back desperately.

"You or I," he said through his teeth — "Well —" he put his hand to his bosom and there was the dull gleam of metal. But the other had marked his action and instantly his hand flew from his cloak; there was the flash and report of a pistol-shot and the King's messenger fell backwards silently into the mist.

"How is William of Orange served now?" cried the man peering forward; his smoking pistol in his hand, "where are you, you popish dog?"

He sprang forward through the pools and morasses, and confused by the gathering gloom, stumbled over the body. The King's messenger had fallen prone, his head down among the mud and stones; his slayer lifted him up, and taking his face in his hands peered down into it.

The Jacobite was quite dead; from a little hole in his temple

the thin black blood trickled; it had been a true shot; the man who held him smiled.

"I was afraid — in this cursed light," he muttered, "that I might have bungled." Opening the dead man's coat, he went swiftly through the pockets. He found papers, sealed and loose; a purse and a few trinkets.

The money he flung out into the marsh; the other matters he thrust carefully into the breast of his coat; it was not light enough to distinguish the papers; he took every scrap the dead man carried, without pausing to select.

Then he rose beside the body and looked round. It would soon be utterly dark; the snow was recommencing to fall heavily; it was now nearly completely dark; he had to feel his way cautiously over the marsh as he turned in the direction of the light that glanced through the snow-storm.

He made steadily toward it; the snow stinging in his face, and saw it grow larger till he could discern the snowflakes drifting swiftly through the faint halo it cast upon the dark.

The ground grew firmer under foot; he had gained a tongue of dry land, and in front of him, barely visible, was the black outline of the smuggler's hut with the lamp flaring yellow in the square window; with this aid he found his way to the door and, using the hilt of his sword, knocked heavily.

There was a little silence, then the sound of cautious footsteps.

The door was slowly unbolted, opened an inch or so.

"Who is it?" said a woman's voice in a quick whisper.

"Mr. Wedderburn — the King's messenger," he answered.

"The password?"

"The white rose and the golden lily — England and France."

She opened the door at that and motioned him to enter.

As he obeyed he found himself face to face with a young girl; she held a candle in her hand that guttered in the draught and sent a trail of smoke and flame over her shoulder; round her brown bodice was a kerchief of vivid scarlet and in her ears hoops of red-gold glittered and swung.

"My father is out looking for you, Mr. Wedderburn," she said with the calm of one grown easy at a perilous trade, careless and used to danger.

"I am late," he answered. With a heavy step he advanced into the room. She bolted the door

"Yes — the boat was expected two hours ago — we were there to meet you — you missed my father, sir? — he went to the coast; he will be returning soon."

In silence he flung off his dripping cloak and hat and half-turning, glanced at Celia Hunt. She looked back at him with a sudden arrested interest.

It was the most remarkable, the handsomest face that she had ever seen; both his expression and the carriage of his splendid person indicated an arrogance that neither speech nor action might express; it seemed as if he forever contained a surging, passionate haughtiness; it was in the lines of his clear-cut mouth and in the expression of his dark blue eyes; eyes whose beauty was marred by a look, strained, slightly distraught. He wore no peruke and his short hair was black as his heavy brows; he was of a pale complexion naturally, and now his eyes showed dark in a face markedly pale.

"Ye are the messenger from St. Germains?" asked Celia Hunt.

"Have I not said so?" demanded Mr. Wedderburn with a curl of his short upper lip. "Why do you stare so, wench? I am not used to wait for my welcome."

"Ye are not he who came here last under the name of Andrew Wedderburn," said the girl.

"You must be used to feigned names here," was the answer. "Do you doubt me? — be satisfied." With the slightly grandiloquent magnificence that was his unconscious manner, he drew forth the papers from his breast and held them out.

She saw the seal of King James on the topmost. "You will stay the night here?" she said.

He gave a reckless little laugh and seated himself at the table.

"When did the King's son leave here?"

"This morning."

"I am to meet him in London. And Mr. Caryl; you have heard from him?"

"He told of your coming."

"Ah — he also, I am to meet in London." He leaned back in his chair as if he was weary and stared into the fire with moody eyes.

The girl, Celia Hunt, set about getting food with an air half-awed, half-doubting.

Of all the Jacobites, nobles, captains and gentlemen, spies and common rufflers who had used her father's hut in their passage to and from France, this man was the most at ease, the most arrogant of manner, as if his life was in no danger, nor his cause in any fear of failure; yet at the same time she had seen none with eyes that held such excited wildness or who kept his hand so continually on his sword. She puzzled over him; he was no daredevil of a cavalier or knight-errant, eager for adventure like some of these plotters; there was nothing roistering or gay about him; he had an air of passionate coldness; like a Puritan who disdains the worldly things about

him and puts a full-blooded strength into grave desires; he looked past the girl as if she had been an old woman, a treatment she was not used to; she was handsome enough in her lean, vivid way to win courtesy at least; and often more from men older and graver than this one.

The Duke of Berwick had kissed her when he left that morning and given her the diamond brooch that glittered on her breast; it was the Stuart way of winning and keeping loyalty; she was shrewd enough to know it was only a manner of paying a debt, but she liked the implied compliment that it was not money could buy her services; this man, she thought scornfully, might likely enough reward her at parting with a handful of silver. Having spread the remains of the Duke of Berwick's breakfast on a cloth of smuggled lace and having set beside them some bottles of the wine brought secretly from France, the girl turned to Mr. Wedderburn.

"Your supper," she said curtly.

He rose, flung himself before the table and began to eat absently.

"You had a rough passage," remarked Celia, eying him.

"Yes," he barely looked at her as he spoke.

"You are often employed by His Majesty ?"

"Yes," was his answer, given even more coldly than before.

Celia came closer, resting her firm brown hands on the edge of the table and, leaning forward, she peered into his face.

The ragged yellow lamplight flickered over her, lighting her eyes and her dusky hair; she spoke, very low.

"You are a Williamite spy," she said steadily.

Mr. Wedderburn pushed his chair back and his mouth took on the scornful curve that came there very easily.

"Prove it," he answered quietly.

"I cannot prove it — but I know," said Celia Hunt. "You are that damned thing — a spy. You dare not lie deep enough to deny it."

He rose up softly; he was outside the circle of the lamplight, but her straining eyes saw his face was drawn.

"I dare do anything," he said, "but I do not choose to answer."

"There is no need," she said, very erect and taut, "I know."

They faced each other, the table and half the room between them; he touched his breast lightly; a square-cut diamond ring glistened through the lace that fell over his hand.

"I carry a something here," he said with a light haughtiness, "that will serve my turn against anything you may say."

"How did you get them?" she asked. "The papers — how much do you know?"

His lids dropped over his flashing eyes; he lifted his head still higher.

"Enough," he said.

"To hang us all," said Celia Hunt hoarsely. "My God!"

"Perhaps," he assented. "Now will you try to send a warning to Jerome Caryl?"

She had fallen back a step.

"No," she said. "I shall prevent you leaving this place —"

He laughed. "Who will stop me?" he asked.

She swayed a little, staring at him.

"You know too much," she panted. "Oh, my God, I would give something to know what to do." He laughed at her; with a lithe movement he came close, his right hand was loosely over his sword, the other, shapely and white, rested on his hip, thrust into the folds of his purple sash; the carelessness of his attitude stung her like a taunt.

"I am a fool!" she cried passionately. "I should have waited till ye slept then bid my father settle you — you hireling spy!"

"Slept here!" he answered with curling lip, "and keep a civil tongue, baggage, or I shall strike you down. I have no ceremony with your kind."

"Ah," she whispered, "you would dare to murder me."

"I have dared God, Himself," he answered wildly, "I know nothing you can name I would not dare — but I should disdain to murder you —"

Her horror-stricken eyes dwelt on his magnificent face; her angry courage ebbed before his strangeness.

"Who are you?" she asked.

But he laughed, not heeding her; his eyes showed hazed and vacant.

"Accursed," he muttered — "God knows — accursed — at least one of the masters of the earth — mad perhaps — you have heard of me, belike —" He turned a distracted gaze on her; she thought suddenly that he was mad — or drunk, and cowered against the wall in personal fear.

Again he laughed loudly, and moved unsteadily, lurching toward her, it was as if some passion of his soul had been suddenly loosed and blinded him.

"Black magic — and blood —" he said wildly.

"Cursed — always blood — and witchery — you cannot get rid of it — the thought of Hell — and the faces of your dead who died foully — your disfigured dead — and your child slaying your child — both damned — and singeing in Hell!"

He stared at her with his blue eyes vague and fixed; she shrieked out thinly:

"God's name — who are you?"

"We conjure in the Devil's name!" he answered madly. "I am of the cursed Dalrymples — and I am damned in the name of John, Master of Stair!"

CHAPTER XI

THE MASTER OF STAIR

THE sound of his own name seemed to sober the man; he sank down heavily into a chair, clutching his sword, his wild vacant eyes staring before him. Celia Hunt stood dumbly regarding him, disbelief and fear in her face. The Master of Stair!

She had heard of him as the fiercest of Whigs, one of the most powerful men in the three Kingdoms, the friend of William of Orange — and the ruler of Scotland — yet he was here doing spy's work and needlessly revealing himself! It was incredible; yet she had heard that the Dalrymples were mad — and accursed: if this were not he, why should he lie: claim so burdensome a title.

She crept a little closer.

"You are the Master of Stair?" she whispered. "You ask me to believe that?"

He looked up at her and his eyes were not the eyes of any mere ordinary man, she thought.

"I am John Dalrymple," he said, "what have you heard of me that you shrink away so?"

"And you do this work!" she cried.

"I would trust no other man to do this work I have in hand," he answered. "Nobles and princes are among your Jacobite plotters — we do not send hired scum to combat them. I am the Master of Stair."

"Ah! and why do you tell me?"

"You!" his eyes flickered over her scornfully. "Why should I not tell you?"

"Would you bribe me to your side?" she asked breathlessly.

"No," he answered; "I have accomplished my end. I know all I need to know. I touched the bottom of their plot days ago." He rose with a sudden laugh. "Berwick and his fellow-fools! They have been too secure — did they think we had neither eyes nor ears!"

Celia Hunt moistened her lips slowly with the tip of her red tongue.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

He hesitated, glanced at her with gloomy scorn. "I am going to London as Andrew Wedderburn; to-morrow night I shall meet Jerome Caryl and obtain from him the names of all concerned in this last plot."

"Then?"

"Then, wench, I shall put that list before the King," he answered, "and the business will be done with — this popish scum will lie quiet a while."

"Clean work for a gentleman, Sir John," she cried in a clear scorn. "I know some dirty knaves would not go to such lengths of treachery to save their necks —"

He swung round on her; but she laughed up into his face without flinching.

"Why, you can kill me," she said, "I am a Jacobite, a smuggler, I've helped many a fugitive out of England and many a conspirator in — and if you are what you say, I am doubly glad to be the enemy of the government whose ministers are such as you!"

"You are very reckless," said the Master of Stair. "I shall not forget you are outside the law."

"As you are outside hope of Heaven!" she answered him fiercely. "Accursed, root and branch — you damned Dalrymples — oh, I have heard some tales of you — if you indeed be he they call the Master of Stair."

He put his hand to his side and stared down at her; he had grown ghastly white.

Lithe and quick in her movements she swung close to him, the blood flushing her dark cheek.

"How did your sister die?" she mocked with the courage of desperation.

"As any man's might have done," he answered hoarsely.

"How did your brother die?" she cried.

"Stop!" cried the Master of Stair, "Stop!"

But she drew herself up defiantly and flung out "How did your son die, Sir John Dalrymple! Surely there is a curse on you!"

He stood motionless, staring.

"I think his brother killed him," whispered Celia Hunt. "I think your brother shot himself for hate of you — I think your sister went mad and slew her bridegroom —"

"Does all the world know this?" he said in a strange voice.

"Your family has been a fine subject for common talk these many years," she answered.

He gave a vacant laugh and turned on his heel.

"I have borne too much for your tongue to move me much — yet — if you speak of *him* again — my God! — I shall strike you silent!"

Despite herself his tone awed her; she shrank back into the shadows and her venom died on her tongue.

There was a silence.

The Master of Stair picked up his hat and cloak and turned toward the door. He took a whistle from his breast and blew three times into the night.

Celia Hunt cried as figures formed out of the blackness.

"Arrest this girl for high treason, Captain," said the Master of Stair in a manner quiet and courteous as a couple of soldiers stepped into the room, "and search the house — see to it she sends no messages — you will find me in Romney to-night — to-morrow in London."

"I was glad to hear your signal, Sir John," answered the soldier, " 'tis cold on these fens."

"A vile place," said the Master of Stair. "I think the Jacobites will use it no more. You have arrested the man, Hunt?"

"Yes, Sir John; we found him on the fens."

"Good-night, Captain." He lifted his hat and was gone into the dark.

Celia Hunt unpinned the Duke of Berwick's brooch and slipped it inside her bosom before they came to tie her hands.

"Maybe," said the officer, "he or both of you will choose to turn informer."

Celia flung up her head with a jerk that loosened her hair from its pins and sent it rippling down her back: she laughed.

Sir John Dalrymple sat in his room in Romney a few hours later writing.

The room was warm and comfortable; a bright fire burned on the red-tiled hearth; a lamp hung over the table; Sir John wore a scarlet satin dressing-gown that fell open on his shirt and cravat; a crystal decanter stood empty beside him and a half-filled wine-glass.

He wrote with a reckless air of carelessness, his hand flew fast over the paper in a bold trailing writing; as he finished a sheet he tossed it across the table and took another. He was interrupted by some one softly entering; he looked up with an absorbed frown to see his secretary coming toward him with letters in his hand.

Sir John pushed his chair back and flung down his pen; his brilliant eyes were shadowed underneath and there was a curious drag at the corners of his mouth as if he had been in great pain.

"From London?" he demanded as he took the letters.

"Yes, Sir John — forwarded by my lord your father to the name you gave him."

"Sit down," said the Master of Stair. "I may need you, Melville."

The secretary, meek and fair, sat down at the further end of the table and began mending a pen.

Sir John took up the first of his letters and glanced over it eagerly.

"From Breadalbane," he said. "More of these cursed clans have come in — but the Macdonalds remain obdurate — I am glad of it."

He dashed the letter down.

"Melville, you will get me those maps of the Highlands I spoke of — I must see Breadalbane — he is in London now — his caution allows him to put but little on paper."

"Yes, Sir John," answered the secretary and noting his master's angry tone he gave him a furtive glance and saw him still brooding gloomily over Breadalbane's letter.

There followed a long pause of utter slience; then the secretary was roused into a start by a letter being flung down the

table with a force that sent it onto the carpet by his feet; he was used to sitting quiet under stormy episodes and with an unmoved face he went on mending the pen; but he gave a covert glance at the letter. It was one of those he had brought up; the seal was still unbroken and the inscription was in a woman's hand; a writing the secretary knew very well since it was that of Sir John's wife.

Another silence broken at last by the Master of Stair:

"A letter from the King," he said, "put it with the others, Melville."

"His Majesty does not know you have left London, Sir John?"

"No — nor need he — I intend to say nothing of this plot till I have discovered everything. I'll have no more Dangerfield scares to make the Jacks laugh. You will take heed, Melville, that you do not mention to any this visit to Romney."

The secretary assented meekly. The Master of Stair leaned back in his chair; above his red gown his colorless face showed of a ghastly pallor.

"I will write to Breadalbane," he said, "I will dictate the letter."

Melville drew a sheet of paper toward him and dipped his pen in the ink.

"Head it Kensington," said Sir John. "And say — I am sorry Glengarry and Keppoch are safe — but glad Makian has not come in — it will be a great work of charity to be exact in rooting out that damnable race — the worst in all the Highlands. I rejoice that they have not taken the oaths."

The secretary's pen went busily over the paper; Sir John took up his wine-glass and emptied it slowly.

"That is all," he said. "Fill that out."

The secretary handed the finished letter across the table and Sir John signed it, then fell back again in his chair. In silence, Melville put the papers together.

"There in my own hand — for my son in Holland," said the Master of Stair. "Put them up — maybe the child will never read them, nevertheless send them." He put his hand to his head and the strange distortion of his mouth deepened, marring his face.

Melville cleared the table and put the letters neatly into a portfolio; wiped the pens and took away the inkstands; his quiet movements did not disturb the silence.

"Give me that letter on the floor," said the Master of Stair, suddenly.

The secretary obeyed; Sir John took it with the tips of his fingers and laid it on the bare table in front of him.

"You may go now — Melville," he said. "I shall start by daybreak, but alone — I shall see you in London to-morrow evening — you may come again presently and help me to undress —"

"Yes, Sir John."

The secretary moved to the door and there stopped, struck by something utterly tragic and forlorn in the figure of the man he was leaving. The Master of Stair was leaning back with his head uplifted against the stiff black back of his chair, his hands lay slackly on the arms and his eyes were set and vacant:

"Sir John," said the secretary timidly. "Will you not go to bed ?"

"No," said the Master of Stair, without moving, "No,"

Still Melville lingered.

"You look tired, Sir John," he ventured.

"Why should you care?" was the answer. "Take your own rest, Melville."

The secretary came back into the room. "Sir, as you ride to London so early, it would be better if you slept."

Sir John sat up and looked at the speaker with wide eyes.

"If I might choose I would never sleep again," he said. "And I would never see the dark." He gave a short laugh and took up his wife's letter; there was a little pause; the secretary waited, ill at ease.

"Melville —" the Master of Stair spoke abruptly, "when did my sister die?"

A little painful silence, then the secretary answered awkwardly: "It was before I came to you, Sir John, about twenty years ago, I think."

Sir John turned the unopened letter over in his hands.

"It seems longer," he said gloomily. "'Tis an old tale now — but I had it flung in my face to-day — that — and other things. I thought I had forgotten — but I remember now that I can never bear to open a door that resists — for fear — for fear of seeing again what I saw then. When I thrust open that resisting door and saw her murdered bridegroom across the threshold — and her eyes blinking at me over it — Melville, her mad eyes — that looked as I have seen mine —" He dashed his hand on the table and his black brows contracted into a frown of agony; his was the fierce pride that disdains control and restraint; he was reckless of the watching curiosity of the other man.

"Why did that wench remind me?" he cried bitterly. "I hear Janet's scream again — and see over her bare arm the — faugh! these things are not terrible to hear, Melville; they are

easily told — but when you *see* them — by God! when you *see* them — I think you do not forget."

He lifted his wild, blue eyes with something almost like appeal in them.

"It makes a tale for common folk to mouth," he said. "Can nothing be buried too deep for spite to unearth it? Twenty years ago! I remember I wore my first sword that day — cursed — what sins have we done to be so cursed? Melville — you were there when they brought my dead son home —" He leaned across the table and his voice sank. "Tell me," he said hoarsely, "did he not look terrible?"

Melville shrank away.

"Sir," he faltered, "no more than any dead who die so."

"Who has died so since Cain?" demanded the Master wildly: "slain by his brother — God and man call it an awful thing."

"Sir —'twas in mimic fight — a most unhappy accident."

"So we call it; so we gloss it over — but you and I know better, Melville," answered the Master — "They hated each other — like I hated my brother — but he shot himself — better than if I had done it — yet this child's guilt is mine — Melville, he was only twelve, but the black Dalrymple blood rose in him — my sins return to lay my house in ruins and dishonor me."

"He rose, thrusting his chair back; with his great height emphasized by the flowing scarlet gown, his white face and his passionate eyes dark with pain, he looked almost terrible; the secretary drew further outside the circle of the lamplight.

"Many men, Sir John," he said in his even official voice, "would gladly have your sorrows to enjoy your fortunes.

Worldly greatness such as yours is a fine balance to private misfortunes."

This smooth axiom was unheeded by the other, but he caught and dwelt on the sense of what was said.

"What do I live for, Melville? Why have I flung myself into the plot — to work with my own hands? Why do I plan to sweep the Highlands bare of thieves — to rein in a kingdom and fly grandly above the breath of popular hate? It is only that I may forget — even for a while — I wish to plunge knee-deep through the press of factions, to mount, and ever mount, to grasp power, and, by Heaven, wield it — that I may cheat myself into thinking I forget what I shall never forget — unto the end!" As he spoke he began pacing the room; there was a curious lightness in his step; as if he feared to walk heavily; as if he dreaded waking echoes; he still held his wife's letter in his hand.

"Melville, get you to rest," he said over his shoulder and his tone invited no dallying with his command; the secretary turned and the door closed softly on his departure.

Sir John stopped under the lamp and broke the seal of his letter.

It was dated from his London house and written in a trembling, much blotted, hand.

It began:

Sir John,

Indeed you must come home, indeed I cannot bear — I know not where you are. Was such your commands? My lord, your father, says he will send this with the other letters, the Lord can alone tell if you will get this, as my lord, your father, as you know, lies to me without pity, yet complaints of him are not the reason of my writing, yet I would say few women would take from him what I do patiently

being past long since all attempts to move either you or him to any consideration for me whose fate is the heartbroken and neglected, with no friend but one whom you know — and do not like, I mean Tom Wharton, who is often here now; but I cannot help it; he knew my boy and the house is killing me with its emptiness and loneliness; my lord is morose and hates me and therefore, though God knows I would be willing never to see your face again, I do ask you to come back if you would not find me mad or flown; perhaps you do not care that my heart is broken and that since the boy —

The Master of Stair tore the letter savagely across.

"Why did I open it?" he cried passionately. "Why does she reproach me? Can I give her back her boy?"

He crossed to the dying fire and thrust the half-unread, ill-written letter into the heart of the flames and his face was very bitter.

"Had I not mated with a fool, my luck might have been better," he said fiercely. "When I have fought and silenced all the world her wails rise to unnerve me — the boy! — what does she know what it was to me to lose that boy! But you shall not forget grief, madam, in the company of Tom Wharton." He flung himself into his old place at the table; outside a clock struck three; on the hearth his wife's letter flared into a tall thin flame above the dead coals.

"God knows I would be willing never to see your face again —"

The sentence recurred to him dully; so utterly alone — who was there that would care to see him again?

He knew of none; the boy was dead.

"I care not," he muttered to himself. "I am the Master of Stair. I am Scotland. I do not need a home — a woman's affection — those things are for smaller men and what matter if they point at me as a man accursed — is not my name state-

ly high above it all ? I care not." Yet even as he spoke his head sank wearily into his hand and the helpless, useless tears were blinding him.

CHAPTER XII

THE LOVE OF DELIA

DELIA FEATHERSTONEHAUGH sat alone in the back parlor of "The Sleeping Queen"; it was New Year's Eve, about six o'clock and the quiet little inn was deserted.

It stood in a dreary back street close to Westminster Abbey and was a resort well-known to Jacobites and almost unheard of by others; in the upper rooms was a printing-press that turned out hundreds of the lampoons and pamphlets that daily strewed the city and in this dull chamber more than one famous gentleman had drunk to the health of King James.

Delia had been alone all day, her brother and Jerome Caryl had been summoned to a meeting with Berwick, who was in hiding in Southwark; she knew they would return to meet the messenger from France, Mr. Wedderburn, who was due this evening, but the hour she could not tell.

The room was large and low with plain plaster walls and uncarpeted floor; on the high chimneypiece two huge white china dogs grinned at each other either side a wooden clock; the fireplace was laid with rough brown Dutch tiles that bore the history of the fall of man in rude bold figures; Delia sat in one of the well-worn chairs, and stared absently at the round fat face of Eve who looked up distressfully from the hearth, glowing red from the fire.

The room was full of the sound of bells, the bells of St.

Margaret's and the Abbey chiming together steadily. The girl listened to them dreamily, and her thoughts were in Scotland, the desolate Glencoe — the Glen o' Weeping — were they safe, those Macdonalds? — very far-away they seemed, helpless, too, and pitiful for all their fierceness; she prayed they might have taken the oaths; she did not care to think of Ronald Macdonald as among the dead.

With a little sigh she leaned forward; she wore a long dress of dark gray silk and in the heavy curls of her hazel hair was a band of velvet of a bright pure blue; in the plain collar of her gown shone a little turquoise brooch.

Her eyes, dark brown and brooding, looked soft as pansies under her smooth white brow, and her mouth strong and gentle was very sweetly set; it was a fair musing face she rested on her hand; a face calmly troubled.

Through the bells came the sound of footsteps; she thought it might be her brother or Caryl, but the step was too light for either.

She rose slowly, her eyes on the door.

It opened and a man stepped in.

"Miss Delia?" he asked softly, "the sister of Sir Perseus?"

"Yes."

He closed the door.

"They sent me here to wait the coming of Mr. Caryl," he said. "I am Andrew Wedderburn — from France." He came into the room, his hat in his hand; Delia looked at him in silence, she stood with her hand on the arm of her chair, the firelight full on her face.

"May I wait here?" asked Mr. Wedderburn. "I have satisfied the host of my identity — but you — will you see my papers?"

"Sir — we do not question friends," she said. "How should you be here if you were not the King's messenger?"

His blue eyes dwelt on her a second with a curious look; he laid his hat on a chair. "Help me with my coat," he said quietly. "Will you not — the room is warm?"

She came slowly toward him with a half-hesitation. He wore a light-colored roquelaure that he had unbuttoned and great riding-gloves that he pulled off to fling beside his hat; as Delia approached him she was aware of a heavy perfume mingled with the atmosphere of cold outer air without, that he carried. Timidly she took his coat by the collar and helped him with it; as she did so his hand, ice-cold, touched hers and she colored foolishly.

"Thank you," he said and crossed to the fire.

Delia stood still, holding his coat; the strong perfume it was redolent of seemed to make her giddy; the close contact with his personality had been as strong, as real a thing as if some one had struck her; she turned to look at the man with a feeling that her head was spinning.

He had taken some papers from his breast and was looking at them; he wore a suit of geranium-colored velvet, a waistcoat branched with silver and buttoned with brilliants; his face and the front curls of his black peruke were powered; over his lace tie a bow of wide black velvet was tied under his chin; the scabbard of his sword was gold and he wore a number of ornaments that glittered as he moved, yet his appearance was one of gloom not gaiety, and the splendor of his superb face was marred by a look of wildness, contained and held in.

Delia gave a little half-cry of surprise:

"Sir," she said faintly, "came you in this guise from France?"

He looked up as if he did not understand.

"I came by Romney Marsh," he said. "Hunt's cottage — you know it?"

"I mean," explained Delia with a great flush, "that our messengers are usually more plainly habited."

He glanced over his clothes.

"Ah!" he gave a sudden smile, "merely the fashion of Paris, Miss Delia — I have escaped detection — so what matters it?"

"Nothing," she assented. "Only you look more like one of the Prince's courtiers, Mr. Wedderburn, than the King's friends, who usually go roughly clad."

He gave her another quick look.

"See my commission, madam — "

"Oh, no — " she protested. "Show it to Mr. Caryl — "

"Is he coming here — soon?"

"Yes — to meet you, Mr. Wedderburn."

She dropped into silence after that; he put his papers back and stared at the brown tiles, suddenly he looked at her:

"How loud the bells sound," he said, "it is Westminster is it not?"

"Yes," said Delia.

He turned and stood with his back to the fire.

"Why do you remain there?" he asked. "Do I frighten you that you will not come and sit down?"

"You — a little confuse me," she answered, then feeling the folly of it was silent again.

Mr. Wedderburn laughed.

"A plotter, Miss Delia, should not so easily be put out — you are an ardent plotter, are you not?"

With a semblance of ease she crossed over to him. "I know not," she said. "I have done nothing for my cause — as you have, sir."

"I have served my King well," he answered gloomily There fell a little silence; they were only a foot apart and the sense of his presence over her was as strong as if he touched her with both hands; instinctively she made a sharp movement backwards and something fell with a rattle to the ground.

"Your brooch," said Mr. Wedderburn and picked it up

She put her hand to her open collar.

"Ah — it is hard to fasten."

"Let me try," said he gravely.

She looked at him in a confused manner.

"Yes; the fastening is difficult," said Mr. Wedderburn with the sapphire in his hand — hold up your head."

Obviously nerving herself, Delia obeyed; he bent over her and his tie brushed her bosom; his hand touched her bare throat as he adjusted the brooch; at the sensation she gave an uncontrollable start that made the pin again fly and prick her flesh; with a little cry she stepped back.

"I have hurt you!" cried Mr. Wedderburn; and his white face slightly flushed — "Forgive me — "

"Ah, no, 'twas mine own fault," said Delia, but if the scratch had been poisoned she could not have spoken more faintly or with paler lips.

Mr. Wedderburn looked at her keenly and she seemed to know it though her eyes were downcast, for her face was flushed as suddenly as his and she set her teeth in her under lip.

"What is your part in these plots?" he asked abruptly.

Still looking down she answered.

"Sir, I do what I am bid — at present little enough — if a chance came I should pray to be worthy of it — I would give my life for the cause."

"What cause?" demanded Mr. Wedderburn. "The invasion of England and the assassination of the King?"

"The King?" she echoed, amazed.

"King William — "

"Ah — the Prince!" cried Delia. "Do they, sir, call him King at St. Germains?"

Mr. Wedderburn looked vexed: "King *de facto* he is, Miss Delia — even when you acknowledge James King *de jure!*"

Delia smiled.

"We make no count of these lawyer's terms, sir — "

"Nor of the law, I think," he answered. " 'Tis my profession."

"You are a lawyer, sir?"

He smiled gloomily.

"Yes — a rare thing, you will say to find a lawyer and a conspirator in one —"

"Oh, no," said Delia, "but I had rather, sir, you had been a soldier."

"I have been that, too," he answered. "I've trailed a pike in France and Holland with fine scum for company — " he turned round on her suddenly — "that must have been before you were born, Miss Delia."

She gave a start of surprise; he seemed a young man; he read her thought and smiled:

"I am six and thirty; you, I think, not above eighteen; my soldiering was more than twenty years ago — a dead

thing! — but you have not answered me — are you deeply in this plot — to assassinate the Prince?"

"I have not heard of it," she answered. "They do not tell me everything — yet I can answer for Mr. Caryl at least that he would not stain his cause with murder."

He frowned.

"Is he your lover?"

"No," her brown eyes lifted steadily. "I have no lover."

Mr. Wedderburn considered her curiously.

"Well, you are young enough," he said.

"Older than you think," she smiled; her eyelids fell again.

They both became aware of a difference in the room; Mr. Wedderburn went to the window.

"The bells have stopped," he said; he opened the casement with a reckless impatient gesture, and a cloud of snow was blown in on him. "Come here," he said in a lowered voice. "See — 'tis so dark 'tis like looking over the edge of the world — and the flakes go by like souls — millions of them — and all — I think lost — "

Delia crept up beside him, trembling and silent; he leaned his stately head against the mullions and stared out on to the utter dark; the drifting snow clung to the vivid velvet of his coat; Delia saw his diamonds rise and fall with the quickness of his breathing and felt her own heart beating thickly; a vague sense of unreality touched her like the chill of the outer air and made her shiver.

"Hark!" said Mr. Wedderburn.

The bells burst out again and the sharpness of their music was a pain; the snow went past in a slow rhythm of descent; Mr. Wedderburn turned and looked at Delia.

"Ah — it is cold — shut the window," she said, and she closed her eyes and swayed as if she fainted inwardly.

But he stood motionless, the snow drifting over him, his hand on the open window; the mad, reckless blood of his doomed race rose in him; he spent his life in trying wild means of forgetting his great unhappiness and here, in the pale, pure face shrinking away from him, was one way of distraction; he was as picturesque in his thoughts as in his person and he imagined her soul, simple, white as the snow without, standing before him, waiting for a sign to flutter into his hand; he smiled gloomily; she was not the first to respond to the obvious attraction of his flaunting personality, but she had the novelty of a singular, gracious freshness, an almost childlike simplicity of demeanor; it was exquisite to think she knew nothing of him.

It was as if there lay a way through her soft brown eyes of momentarily escaping from himself.

She leaned against the wall, he watching her; one little hand rested on the paneling beside her, her white throat showed through the open collar; her thick, dull hair cast trembling shadows on her cheeks, he thought it a pretty color and was gloomily pleased that he could still admire the tint of a woman's hair.

"Delia," he said quietly.

She looked up, to hear this man speak her name was like seeing it flash written in stars across the sky; she shrank under it abashed and lifted timid eyes that to his bitter wretchedness seemed soft as a caress.

He smiled.

"How little you know of me!" he said.

She found slow words to answer him.

"We have one creed, one King, one aim," she said. "I desire to know no more of you, sir."

"Delia," his voice fell very musically low. "If you knew more of me — say, if we had known each other years — would you find it possible to care for me?"

She stared, dumb and scarlet, the terror in her questioning eyes was the finest compliment ever paid him: he smiled again with his curious Puritanical haughtiness as if even while he led her on, he despised himself and her.

"Would you find me a man easy to care for?" he said again. "I wonder — for I — "

She interrupted: "Sir — I do not think you have failed to find those who would answer that question."

"Ah, let me speak," he said gently, "let me say that I do find you made to be loved — "

"Sir! do you usually so play with words with every stranger?" she cried.

"Why, never before," he smiled, "and are we strangers — did you not say we had one creed — one King — one aim?"

"Ah, I do think you palter with me!" cried Delia with the distress of one drawn and netted against her will. "Mr. Caryl is late — "

"I would he were later," said Mr. Wedderburn.

"There is no need for me to keep you company," she answered faintly.

"No need?" His manner flashed into the overbearing. "Not if I ask you to stay?"

"I will go."

"Why?" His blue eyes lifted imperiously. "Miss Delia — do you dislike me?"

"I do not know you," she faltered.

His face darkened.

"Ah, yes, you know me as much in these moments as you ever will — I know you — to the bottom of your white heart."

"Know me?" she winced and blushed.

"I know you do not dislike me," he said, studying her curiously. "Though your lips may say so."

She answered bravely.

"Sir — I have not taught them to lie."

He came a little nearer to her and again she was aware of the strong perfume he carried, overcoming, stupefying her.

"So," he said, "you cannot lie, and if I said — ah — if I said — " He broke off with a little reckless laugh; his shadow was upon her; his presence seemed to fill the world; she could no more escape it than she could the air about her; she could only shrink away, trembling against the wall.

"If I said — I love you," he asked softly, "you who cannot lie — would say — some day I might love you — would you not?"

"When you tell me that in seriousness," she answered panting, "in seriousness I will reply."

His beautiful eyes laughed.

"Sophistry," he said. "Come, is life so long that we may wait years to say what in one moment we know is true — we have not met for nothing — by Heaven, no!

"Then leave it at that," faltered Delia. "Say no more — ah, for pity!"

With that gentle little cry it seemed to him that his hand closed over her and that he held her soul, simple and white, as he pictured it to do with as he would.

Thinking so he gave her his strange, vacant look, while

she crept away and he fell back into the gloom, surveying her sideways coldly.

The pause, terrible to Delia, was broken by the abrupt entrance of Jerome Caryl.

"Ah," he said; "I was told you were here." He glanced at Mr. Wedderburn and his brows went up ever so slightly.

"The password, sir?" he asked, his hand on the door.

Mr. Wedderburn turned and looked at him: "The white rose and the golden lily — England and France," he said slowly, "and here is my commission." He took from his pocket a parchment with swinging seals and laid it sweepingly upon the table.

Jerome Caryl picked it up, looked at it, then turned to Sir Perseus, who had followed him.

"This is Mr. Wedderburn, the King's messenger," he said gravely, then to the other: "I am glad, sir, of your safe arrival."

"Good-even," said Sir Perseus, then glancing the stranger over: "they keep you fine in France, sir," he commented.

Mr. Wedderburn smiled disdainfully.

"My habit is not the matter under discussion," he returned. "I dress as fits my station — as one of His Majesty's friends."

Sir Perseus shrugged his shoulders; Jerome Caryl seated himself rather wearily, at the table, with a gentle smile of greeting to Delia and spoke to the King's messenger:

"The papers you had to deliver?" he said. "I am anxious, sir, for His Majesty's letter."

Mr. Wedderburn, taking the seat opposite, began the undoing of a packet he took from his breast, the two men meanwhile observed each other; Jerome Caryl openly with a calm

frankness, the King's messenger covertly, sideways and very keenly.

Delia, mechanically closing the window at her brother's bidding, noticed how great a difference between the two at the table and thought that Jerome Caryl had faded utterly beside the vivid presence of the other.

Quiet, contained, grave and modest in manner, his calm melancholy face and person were a fine contrast to Mr. Wedderburn with his over-bold handsomeness, his over-rich dress, his passionate air of impatient lordship, his too emphasized manner of haughtiness and power; the bearing of a tragedy emperor, gloomy magnificence. He was not the type of man to appeal to Jerome Caryl, who set his soft mouth sternly and drooped his hazel eyes disdainfully to his own delicate hand resting on the table.

Mr. Wedderburn swung a letter across the table; in silence Jerome Caryl opened it, and the King's messenger gave a sudden smile at Delia across the length of the room.

Sir Perseus glanced from one to another, conscious that the silence was awkward and unaccountable. "We saw my Lord Berwick to-day," he remarked. "He has had a messenger from Crauford in Scotland."

Delia gave a little start as of one suddenly touched in his sleep.

"Scotland?" she echoed.

Mr. Wedderburn was looking at her.

"Heard ye anything of the submission of the clans?" he asked.

"We heard," said Sir Perseus, "that every clan had come in save the Macdonalds of Glencoe."

"Ah!" said Delia, and she flushed and paled.

"They bear such a hatred to the Campbells, nothing will induce them to follow the others," continued her brother, "and — poor fools — there is no one to trouble to warn them — doubtless you have heard, Mr. Wedderburn, how we have preserved the Highlands to His Majesty by causing them to take the oaths?"

"I have heard," was the answer, "you think the government will be vexed — disturbed at it?"

Jerome Caryl looked up from his letter.

"They were counting on settling the Highlands forever," he smiled. "With fire and sword — they did not reckon on more than half taking the oaths — the Master of Stair and Breadalbane intended to massacre them wholesale."

"You have clever spies to have discovered that much," said Mr. Wedderburn, and under the table his hand was clutched tightly on his sword-hilt.

"I am in England for that," was the answer. "To serve His Majesty. I have defeated the usurper on that well-planned cruelty."

"There remain the Macdonalds," said Mr. Wedderburn slowly.

Suddenly, up to the table, came Delia.

"They must be saved," she said.

Her words rang in a little pause; she was clasping and unclasping her hands nervously, she turned her pure eager face to Mr. Wedderburn.

"Sir, you will help us save them?"

He looked at her and laughed.

"I?" he said — "I? — 'tis amusing — what power have I to save these Highland savages?"

She winced and turned to Jerome Caryl.

"You promised me, Mr. Caryl — "

Sir Perseus interrupted:

"Why, Delia, what are these Macdonalds to you?"

Jerome Caryl spared her an answer: "We will do what we can — " he said. "And they know the risk they run — even yet they may take the oaths."

Delia glanced at him gratefully; she was pale and her brown eyes gleamed unnaturally bright.

"Good-night, sirs," she said faintly.

The three men rose; her brother kissed her cheek; Jerome Caryl came to the door with her, but she looked past him to Mr. Wedderburn, who stared at her with a curious little smile; her face went even whiter; the door fell to behind her and they heard her light footsteps hurrying up the stairs. Jerome Caryl returned to the table.

"Mr. Wedderburn," he said formally, "this is a letter from my Lord Middleton — signed by the King, charging me to collect such names of importance as I can and send the signature back by you as a means of encouraging the French to make a descent on England — "

"His Majesty expects me in a day or so at St. Germains with the signatures," was the answer. "I assure you 'tis a matter for despatch, for King Louis will not act without these names as a guarantee of a rising in England to support him should his men land."

"Lord Middleton also says that you will be the bearer of his grace of Berwick's despatches and a full account of the plot for His Majesty's perusal."

Mr. Wedderburn inclined his head.

"Those were my orders."

"A dangerous mission," put in Sir Perseus. "You will carry a vast responsibility with those papers."

"I have done as dangerous in the service of the King," said Mr. Wedderburn. He turned to Jerome Caryl. "Sir — what names have you to send His Majesty?"

"News from all sides is vastly satisfactory," was the answer. "His grace of Berwick is very confident, the discontent is huge in England; we have the assurances and the signatures of Marlborough, Godolphin, Rochester, Clarendon, Lord Russell, Leeds, Cornbury, Dartmouth, Sidney and many bishops and lords — "

"The whole of the Court ye might say," cried Mr. Wedderburn, with a curious little laugh. "Tell me, are there any who have not signed?"

"Nottingham," said Jerome Caryl with a smile. "Carstairs, Sunderland, Shrewsbury, Devonshire, Dorset and the Master of Stair — these have never to my knowledge meddled with us — Nottingham, because he is a narrow pedant; Devonshire and Dorset for sheer laziness; Sunderland because we would not have him in our ranks — Carstairs and the Master of Stair. . . ."

"For honest motives, perchance," said Mr. Wedderburn.

"I do not say so — God knows. Carstairs I believe is honest — the Master of Stair is not full of scruples. I think he is faithful because he hates us bitterly and because he is a man of one view — he is sworn to the Whigs and would, I think, sell his soul for them — if it is still on the market."

"You hate him," remarked Mr. Wedderburn.

"I do — he constantly thwarts me, he is a man to be feared — but to business, Mr. Wedderburn: these papers you are to

carry to France are with his grace of Berwick — give me two days and I shall have them."

Mr. Wedderburn rose:

"I will call again the day after to-morrow, then," he said, "and start immediately afterwards for France."

He put his commission back into his pocket.

"You will not disappoint me?" he asked. "In two days — "

"I will answer for it, you have them then," said Jerome Caryl, "where are you staying?"

"I am undecided, but any message addressed to 'The Blue Posts,' Covent Garden, will find me."

"I will remember it."

The King's messenger put on his hat and coat in silence; he was not a man for commonplaces, and his haughty manners prevented them in others. He saluted the two men very abruptly and turned from the room.

Jerome Caryl made no attempt to accompany him: there was a quiet dislike in his stiff bow. As the door closed, he remarked to Sir Perseus:

"Middleton is crazed, I think, to trust that man with such a mission."

"I do not like him," was the answer, "but he may be very staunch."

"He knows everything," said Jerome Caryl, frowning. "And his credentials are such that I must trust him — but I doubt his discretion, and I wish Middleton could have sent me a man of whom I knew something."

As Mr. Wedderburn was crossing the dark, outer room he felt a timid touch on his arm; some one fleet and noiseless of foot had overtaken him. It was Delia Featherstonehaugh, — for the moment he had utterly forgotten her.

"Would you do me a favor?" she said panting

He turned, but it was too dark to see her face.

"Why, tell it me," he answered.

"I want you to help me save the Macdonalds of Glencoe — I have — a reason."

There was a long pause; she grew frightened.

"Won't you answer?" she said piteously.

"I have no power," he replied sternly.

"Ah, yes, as much as any of them — and I am afraid the Macdonalds — afraid of — " she paused.

"Of whom?"

"The Master of Stair," she whispered.

He uttered his slight reckless laugh.

"Content ye — I will defend ye from the Master of Stair — on my soul, ye are a sweet thing — I will see ye next time."

She fell back, panting into the dark and he passed on into the outer room where a man was busy sorting and arranging Jacobite pamphlets. He rose to open the door.

"Those are lampoons ye write?" demanded Mr. Wedderburn.

The Jacobite smiled:

"Yes, sir," he said in a low voice, "I do not write them, but they are lampoons."

"Against whom?"

"All the Whigs, sir — one in particular."

Mr. Wedderburn held the open door in his hand; he spoke over his shoulder:

"The Master of Stair?" he asked.

The Jacobite answered under his breath.

"Truly that devil — the Master of Stair."

Mr. Wedderburn's blue eyes flashed dark and fierce.

"Be careful, sir, how ye offend the devil," he said, and, banging the door furiously in the face of the Jacobite, strode off down the street.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MASTER'S WIFE

LATE that evening the Master of Stair entered his mansion in St. James's Square and paessd through the great empty house to the library at the back. This room was vast, handsomely furnished and gloomy, well-lit by hanging lamps and a great fire on the massive hearth; the walls were lined with books, the ceiling domed and painted with dark figures that appeared to mount into endless space; the chimneypiece, wreathed with heavy garlands of wooden flowers, supported a huge branched silver stand filled with candles that were reflected in the mirror behind. Dull red velvet curtains draped the long windows, and a heavy pile carpet of the same color covered the floor. In the center of the wall, facing the door, stood a large black oak desk with a bureau either side; on it lay papers and books with two grim bronze busts, labeled "Cato" and "Solon" in lettering that glittered somberly; one of the lamps hung immediately over the desk and threw a strong light down on the man who sat there reading a faded calf-bound volume.

He was quietly dressed in dark brown, and his face, wrinkled, as a walnut shell, was almost hidden by the ringlets of his enormous periwig; he was thin and bent, sixty of sixty-five and had an indescribable air of ease and comfort, as if he was in his element and vastly enjoying himself.

The Master of Stair paused on the threshold and glanced round the somber room.

"Good-evening, my lord," he said.

The man at the desk looked up, half-reluctantly.

"What o'clock is it, John?" he asked.

"Between twelve and one," answered the Master of Stair. "I am later, my lord, than I meant to be." He came into the room as he spoke, and seated himself on one of the stiff-backed chairs by the fire.

"Where is Lady Dalrymple?" he asked drearily.

Viscount Stair shut his book and so turned in his chair that he faced his son.

"Gone to the ball at Kensington," he answered dryly, "accompanied by Tom Wharton."

"Why did you permit it?" flashed the Master of Stair.

The father shrugged his shoulders.

"You must manage your own wife, John," he answered. "Everybody is at the ball. Tom Wharton is as good as another."

Sir John interrupted him:

"Tom Wharton is the greatest rake in England," he said. "I do not choose to have him across my threshold — when I returned from Romney this morning you told me Lady Dalrymple was at the Toyshop with him — now you tell me they have gone to the ball together."

"Why didn't you go yourself?" asked the Viscount calmly. "Who do you think is to take her about? — she must be seen at Court sometimes."

"I was better employed," answered the Master. "You know well enough, my lord, that I have it in hand to crush this rising — this plot — I am but now from one of these Jacobite dens

where I have been aping the part of King's messenger from France."

"In those clothes?" asked his father sarcastically.

The Master of Stair answered impatiently: "I forgot them. I had been dining with Montague, and went straight on to the meeting-place."

Viscount Stair gave an unpleasant smile.

"Well," he said calmly, "you have a fine head, John, you make a good many slips — a number of false steps. Take care the last isn't up Tower Hill." He spoke with an air of abstraction, as if, himself indifferent to everything, he could still feel cynically amused at the blunders of others.

His son gave him an angry glance.

"I have not deserved this, my lord; I have kept inside the law during many storms, and now I *am* the law."

The Viscount leaned a little forward; as he moved it was noticeable that his neck was wry, a defect that gave him the appearance of leering over his shoulder as if he listened to some one who whispered there at his ear.

"*I* have kept you inside the law," he said. "*My* advice has guided you so far — you reckless fool if you had asked me you had not gone among conspirators in that habit."

He pointed mockingly at the gorgeous dress of his son whose anger rose the more at his tone.

"Sir," he said. "I have achieved my purpose for all I am such a fool — they were deceived."

"Being bigger fools," commented the Viscount.

"I say, I am at the bottom of their plot," flashed the Master. "In two days' time I shall have every detail to put before the King."

The Viscount regarded him unmoved.

"Go warily," he said, and his cunning old face wrinkled into an unfathomable smile. "You stand dangerously high, John, and you are dangerously reckless, John."

"And you, my lord?" demanded the Master.

"I? I do not meddle in your schemes, my son. I am a safe spectator — and I find it amusing — sometimes — now and then it is tiresome — your wife is tiresome, John."

"You married me to her," cried the Master bitterly. "For God's sake, sir, remember that you thrust her on me before I was well out of petticoats."

The Viscount frowned.

"I considered a Dalrymple able to manage a woman," he said dryly. "And the marriage was very politic."

"I do not doubt it, my lord," answered the Master passionately. "But do not blame me for a woman not of my choosing."

The father yawned. "I merely commented that she was tiresome," he said. "And so are you at times — but she — is quite insufferable. I assure you this house with no other occupant but that sniveling woman is a miserable place. I cannot write here, I shall have my town house refurnished."

The Master of Stair rose.

"I do not need you, my lord," he said, still in that tone of passionate bitterness, "to point out the wretchedness of my home — it is a fact obvious enough, and by God you should not fling it in my face. I cannot remember that you ever, by one word, tried to mend the unhappiness —"

"And I," returned the Viscount, "cannot remember ever saying I had — it is your life" — he shrugged his shoulders — "I have managed my own — now I only ask to be left in peace. I am not fitted for the part of mentor and never essayed to fill it."

The Master of Stair laughed.

"Peace!" he echoed with wild eyes on his father. "Did your lordship sow peace that you expect to reap it? Not in me, at least, not in me or mine!"

The Viscount had picked up his book again.

"Where is the third volume of Cicero?" he said. "I could not find it. You have the library of a careless man."

"The servants are at your lordship's service," answered the Master and turned on his heel, chafing.

"You forget," remarked his father, "it is New Year's Eve, the season I believe of festivities, good-will and other such antique pleasantries, and I understand the servants are mostly abroad."

The Master gave a wild look round the gloomy room.

"New Year's Eve! We are spending it in an exemplary way!" he cried. "This place looks like good-will and festivity, does it not? How many homes look as gloomy as this to-night!"

"Very few, I should imagine," said the Viscount. "Will you bring me that book if you have it?"

The Master gave him a bitter glance; before he could answer the entrance curtain was drawn aside and a lady entered, a gentleman behind her.

She was wrapped in a long purple cloak, the hood drawn over her head.

At sight of the Master of Stair she hesitated, and the man behind, slipping past her, came into the center of the room.

He was blond, good-humored, elegant; he smiled delightfully as he bowed to the silent figure by the hearth.

"Good-even, Sir John," he said. "I have brought my lady back from Kensington."

"Good-even Mr. Wharton," answered the Master, staring past him.

The atmosphere was decidedly oppressive; the Viscount gave a malicious smile. Lady Dalrymple came forward in a heavy silence, but Tom Wharton knew no such word as embarrassment he smiled still more good-humoredly.

" I was not aware Sir John had returned," he said, addressing the Viscount.

"So I supposed when I saw you enter," said the Master haughtily. "Good-night, Mr. Wharton."

Tom Wharton bowed.

"I take my — dismissal," he smiled. "I shall hope to see you at Kensington, Sir John — *au revoir*, my lady."

She made a slight inclination of her head.

"Good-night, my lord." Tom Wharton's face was dimpled with the most mirthful of smiles; he bowed himself out exquisitely, and when the door closed on him the room seemed the gloomier by contrast.

The silence remained unbroken; the Viscount was making notes on the margin of his book; the Master stood with his back to his wife and stared into the fire; she slowly flung her cloak off with no attempt at speech.

She was a perfect type of Lely's heroines: he had painted her more than once and had delighted in her blonde loveliness, her small features, her great languishing blue eyes, her soft foolish mouth, the pale yellow hair smooth as satin in its great curls, the white shoulders and rosy fingers, the full throat and entrancing little dimple in her chin; she should now have been at the height of her beauty, but unhappiness had worn her delicate face, dimmed her eyes and dragged her mouth, marring the whole with an expression of fretful misery.

Still, to-night rouge, powder and patches had made amends for tears; she was splendidly dressed in flowing white satin, hung about with pearls, and in this soft light no one could have detected a flaw in her beauty, as she sat droopingly, with her hands in her lap.

The Master of Stair turned at last.

"Why did you go with Mr. Wharton?" he demanded. "I desired you not to continue this acquaintance."

"I told you when I wrote," she began.

He interrupted impatiently. "Do you think I have time to read your letters? You knew my wishes — and when I returned this morning I heard that you were with Mr. Wharton at the Toyshop — on my soul — a pretty epitome of your life, I think! — with Tom Wharton at a Toyshop!"

"Everybody goes to them," she answered weakly, "I must do something — this house is unendurable."

"You do not contribute to its gaiety," he said fiercely.

She dropped her blonde head into her hands and broke into crying. He turned his back on her again.

"I am so miserable," she sobbed, "so desolate. Oh, I think my heart is broken."

"You have remarked it before," said her husband bitterly.

She sobbed the louder, crushing her handkerchief to her eyes. "You never think of me," she wailed. "It's killing me — I think — but you don't care — no one does. I am utterly alone — since — Harry — died."

At the mention of his dead son, Sir John swung round on her

"On my soul, madam," he said hoarsely, "I will not hear you on that subject."

She lifted blurred eyes. "No," she panted, "but you can't

— make me — forgive — you can't take away the — empty house — or — my God! — the pain in my heart!"

"Have the other boy back," he flung out, "I am willing."

"No, no," she shrieked. "Harry's murderer — I will never see him again. I wish he was dead — I wish I was dead!"

She burst into uncontrolled hysterical sobs and buried her face in the chair cushions. Her husband's face darkened furiously; he moved away from her, his teeth in his lip. The Viscount looked up from his desk.

"If you have not a Cicero," he said, "perhaps you have an Epictetus? This allusion I must verify."

The Master of Stair walked impatiently to the shelves and finding a volume gave it to his father, then he turned to his wife.

"Madam, cease that wailing," he said. "You will try me beyond endurance."

She made a show of stifling her sobs, and rose, dabbing at her eyes; her fair hair and her white dress seemed to gather all the light in the room; she gleamed from head to foot.

"You take no thought of me," she said wretchedly. "Neither you nor my lord there seem to think — there — is any pity to be felt for — me." She gave a bitter glance toward the placid figure of the Viscount. "He does not care," she panted, "nor do you — what have I done to be so punished?" She turned her tear-blurred face to her husband. "I do not come of a cursed family," she said hoarsely. "Why should I be dragged into your evil fortunes? Why should I pay for your wicked blood, my God, why?"

She clasped her hands passionately in the intensity of the revolt of a weak thing; her eyes were unnaturedly dilated, her bosom rose and fell with her struggling breath; terror and

aversion were expressed in every line of her shrinking figure.

"I have done nothing that my children should be cursed," she said wildly. "It is you — you —"

The Master of Stair interrupted her.

"Take care," he said, very white. "You utter the unforgivable —"

"I shall not ask you to forgive," she answered. "I do not want your favor — you and your blighted race have crazed me — I will say it — I am haunted — day and night — and it is unjust." Her voice was shrill and tortured. "It is unjust that I should so pay because I was foolish and very young — and married you. God knows I never loved you!"

Her words rang cruelly round the vast room and seemed to echo through the pause that followed; the only sound was the rustle of the leaves of the Viscount's book as he turned them and the scratch of his pen as he made a note; the Master of Stair looked sternly before him, his face hardened to a great bitterness.

Lady Dalrymple shuddered; the reaction of her passion came in the heavy tears that rolled down her face. With a childish gesture she put up the back of her hand to hide them, and turned miserably away across the room.

Down the whole gloomy length she went slowly with a weary air of hopelessness; the Viscount looked up from his book, watched her and when the door closed on her gave a little sigh of relief.

"She gets onto a note very irritating to the nerves," he remarked. "It is astonishing how few women will learn to use their words with effect — they throw at you all they can think of — then burst into tears — which is neither logical nor pleasing."

The Master of Stair made no answer; at his feet was a beautiful pink rose his wife had dropped; he picked it up and flung it into the fire.

The Viscount shut his book and turned with a yawn.

"I saw the King to-day," he said. "He asked where you were — Argyll and Breadalbane are desirous to see you about these Highlands."

"Yes," said the Master gloomily. "But the damned thieves have all come in except the Macdonalds of Glencoe — which minds me. I should send those letters to-night — I have the maps of Glencoe. The pass of Rannoch must be secured. The Laird of Weem must close Strath Tay — then with Breadalbane one side, Argyll the other — I think I have the villains."

The Viscount drew a paper out of his desk.

"I had the report from Scotland this morning," he said composedly. "The Macdonalds have taken the oath."

The Master of Stair turned, incredulous, furious.

"Taken the oath!" he cried.

"Yes." His father twisted his wry neck over the paper. "So the commander of the forces says."

Sir John stood silent a moment; when he spoke it was in a quiet tone.

"It need make no difference — I have vowed to make an example of those Glencoe men and will do it."

The Viscount nodded.

"As Lord President of the Court of Session I could suppress this," he said. "And you as Prime Minister for Scotland should be able to accomplish the rest."

"Yes," answered the Master. "I must write to Hill who commands in Fort William — he must be removed — the second in command, Hamilton, is an able man."

"But first you must see Breadalbane," said the Viscount. "Better go carefully."

Sir John lifted his shoulders with a magnificent gesture of disregard.

"I have put myself above caution, my lord," he said. "Give me the letter —" He took it eagerly from his father. "This must be shown to the King?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"Lend me your pen, my lord."

The Viscount handed him the quill, and Sir John dashed it through the passage relating to the Macdonalds.

"If it become necessary to show this paper your lordship can do so," he said. "And I will do the same for the minutes that are to go before the Council at Edinburgh."

His father laughed.

"A bold way of handling difficulties, John," he commented.

"It needs boldness to deal with these cursed Jacks," answered the Master fiercely. "I am going to teach them a lesson this time — they have defied us and laughed at us long enough. This race of thieves goes — utterly."

The Viscount suddenly rose with a little sound of warning.

Sir John turned.

Close behind them stood Lady Dalrymple.

She saw by their faces their thought, and drew herself together defiantly. "I was not spying," she cried feverishly. "You did not hear me enter."

"You were remarkably quiet, madam," remarked the Viscount dryly.

She gave him a frightened look and in a strained silence crossed to the hearth.

"I dropped a flower," she said faintly. "I came back for that."

She looked along the floor and in the chair.

"Do not trouble, madam," said her husband, watching her. "I make no doubt Mr. Wharton's hothouses can supply you with others."

Lady Dalrymple lifted her head, and stared at him with parted lips and flushed face, and a curious little movement of her hand like horror.

"The Queen gave it to me for Harry's grave," she said simply.

The Master of Stair flushed and started as if from a blow.

"You have burnt it?" asked Lady Dalrymple, with a glance at the fire.

The silence answered her.

"Well, well," she said desperately, "I suppose you do not care that his little grave should go bare — only — to-morrow was his birthday — good-night, sir."

She went quietly out of the room.

The Viscount glanced sideways at his son's face, and was silent.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CURSE OF THE DALRYMPLES

THE Earl of Breadalbane smiled into the gloomy face of the Master of Stair.

"They hav'na' taken the oaths," he said. "I'm no' likely to be deceived. I have clear reports sent by Glenlyon — and certainly the Macdonalds couldna' take the oaths without his knowledge." He glanced round on the three men assembled in the massive drawing-room of the Dalrymples; the Viscount, cool and immovable as himself; Argyll, restless and ill at ease, the Master of Stair, dark and impatient.

"So we may proceed," he continued, "without any fear o' offending the law."

"My lord," said the Master of Stair, "we should have proceeded in any case. I have struck out the statement that the Macdonalds took the oath."

Argyll looked up.

"'Tis a dangerous method, Sir John," he said nervousiy. "It would look ugly if it ever came to light, ye ken, and there are a plenty of people would gladly turn it about to work our ruin."

Breadalbane answered:

"Hav'na' I said, cousin, that they ha' no' come in? Therefore we are in our just rights to be punishing avowed traitors."

"My Lord Argyll," smiled the Viscount, "you need not fear

to embark on an enterprise that your cousin's caution deems safe."

Argyll, detecting the sneer, grew peevish.

"Aweel," he replied, "an' the enterprise is so safe and lawful show me the warrant for it, my lords." The Master of Stair turned impatiently in his chair.

"I will be your warrant, my lord," he said. "I am the first minister in Scotland. I take the responsibility."

"Ay?" answered Argyll. "But you are not so high, Sir John, that you cannot fall. And I'll no' mix in this without other safeguard."

"What?" demanded the Master haughtily.

"The King's command."

"The King's command is in his proclamation that all clans not taking the oaths are to be dealt with by the law," answered the Master.

"Aweel," said Argyll shrewdly, "then it should be no trouble to ye, Sir John, to obtain a warrant from His Majesty for the destruction o' the Macdonalds o' Glencoe."

"It is not needful," frowned Sir John.

But the Viscount leaned forward across the table.

"I think the King's consent is needful," he said; he glanced at Breadalbane, whose light eyes rested very disdainfully on his cousin. "What do you think, my lord?"

"As they hav'na' taken the oaths," answered Breadalbane, "we are within the law—yet I'm no' saying that precautions are onnecessary."

"Unnecessary or not I'll no' move without the King's name," said Argyll stubbornly.

"My lord, I will obtain it," flashed the Master of Stair. "Consider it done."

His father lifted his brows.

"Are you so certain of His Majesty?" he asked.

"I am certain of myself," answered Sir John superbly. "I shall, my lord, obtain the King's consent."

"At the audience I had when I made my report," said Breadalbane, "it looked to me that the King kenned little o' Scotland. He seemed glad that so many of the clans had come in — and opposed to violence in dealing wi' the Hielands; but wi' his cough and his strange English I kenned little enow o' what he said. I wasna' thinking ower muckle of him till when I took my leave, I discovered then his wits were where they should be."

"What did he say?" asked Argyll, half-anxiously.

Breadalbane wore an amused smile.

"He gave me a straight look, 'I'm blithe to hae seen you,' he said dryly, 'for the appearance o' your lordship is a sure sign o' the winning cause and as lang as I see you I ken I'm prosperous.'"

"Then he is no' so bad at character reading," commented Argyll.

The Viscount and Breadalbane laughed, but the Master of Stair peremptorily cut them short:

"My lords, let us understand each other plainly. Once the thing is resolved upon, let it be swift and sudden — better to leave it alone than bungle it."

"'Tis the only way," said Breadalbane. "No enemy will enter Glencoe save by craft."

"I did not say craft, my lord," cried the Master of Stair. "I said let it be done swiftly and suddenly — I will send a regiment from Fort William to sweep Glencoe clear of these bandits — another to stop the passes — you and my Lord

Argyll shall hem them in — (yet I hope there will be no fugitives) — and so the thing is done. The name of Macdonald will be cleared from Argyllshire and Invernesshire."

Breadalbane's pale eyes sparkled.

"Will you trust the commander of Fort William?" he asked.

"No — the second in command, Hamilton — a man anxious to make his way. He will serve our purpose. The soldiers must be Campbells — you will have a man, my lord, fitted to lead them."

"Glenlyon," said Breadalbane.

"You will know best. There must be no prisoners."

"But the women and children, Sir John?" asked Argyll. "Ye can transport them to the colonies?"

"No," said the Master of Stair, "no. It shall be fire and sword through Glencoe. I will not have one left alive. I am glad it is winter; now is the time to maul the wretches. Those who fly into the hills will this weather perish."

Then fell a little silence, broken by Argyll.

"The world will call this a massacre, Sir John."

"Maybe, my lord," answered the Master of Stair.

"Do ye repent, cousin?" flashed Breadalbane.

"No," answered Argyll uneasily. "These Macdonalds have been a plague-spot in our ands for lang enow — but—"

"We have done with 'buts'!" cried Sir John. "I am resolved these thieves shall go and they go. The government is strong enough to bear the blame — and you shall have the King's warrant, my Lord Argyll."

He rose and touched the bell.

"I will show you the plan I have made of Glencoe," he

continued, "whereby — securing the pass of Rannoch — we cut off every retreat."

He came back to his seat, frowning.

"But I am sorry Keppoch and Glengarry are safe," he added.

"Weel, they're no' so bad as the Macdonalds," returned Breadalbane.

"Pardon me, my lord; you mean they do not cumber your estates, or thieve your cattle — " answered the Master. "But they prey on Scotland as much as do the Macdonalds."

The secretary entered:

"Bring me those maps of the Highlands," said Sir John.

Argyll drummed his fingers on the table; his eyes traveled uneasily round the gorgeous flamboyant room, in an attempt to avoid the cold glance of his cousin opposite.

"The Jacobites will try to warn the Macdonalds," he said.

"They will not know that we have determined on severity," answered Sir John. "Doubtless they consider the Macdonalds came in with the rest."

"And if they do not," smiled the Viscount, "I think few Jacobites would be devoted enough to journey in this weather to the Highlands with a warning."

"No," answered his son. "I think the Jacobites are otherwise employed. They have tha tin hand which will ruin them."

"A plot?" questioned Breadalbane calmly.

Sir John's blue eyes narrowed unpleasantly.

"Naturally, my lord — they do nothing else. But I have the threads of this in my hands."

Argyll began biting his forefinger nervously, when the Master's glance fell on him he obviously flushed, but his cousin's delicate face was unmoved.

"Another Bedloe affair, Sir John?" he asked.

"No, my lord. There are great names in it — the greatest. In a few days I hope to lay them before the King."

Melville had brought him the maps; he began to lay them out on the table; Argyll gave him a covert look.

"See, my lord," said Sir John, and he handed a paper to Breadalbane. "Is not this correct?" And as he spoke he leaned forward eagerly and traced with his pen the route Hamilton should take from Fort William to Glencoe.

Argyll pushed his chair back from the table, withdrawing himself from the discussion.

"We're no' needed," he said, with an uneasy smile at the Viscount, and a motion toward the Master and Breadalbane. Viscount Stair lifted his shoulders.

"'Tis certainly as wearisome as a Parliament sitting," he answered as he rose. "John, you must arrange the details of this charming little affair with my Lord Breadalbane, who seems to be in sympathy with you — we're even tired of it."

The Master flashed the angry glance his father's mockery never failed to evoke; but the Viscount laughed as he preceded Argyll from the room.

"My cousin and your son are of a mind," remarked Argyll.

"In some things," smiled the Viscount. They passed through the heavy carved doors into an adjoining room.

"I must be taking my leave," pursued Argyll weakly, and seemingly now, when alone with the Viscount, even more ill at ease. "I am due at Kensington — " he paused, then reached a sudden resolution — "My lord," he said, "think you your son will get the King's sanction for this — this — "

"Affair — " finished the Viscount dryly. "Well, I think my

son can do a great deal with the King. They are somewhat alike, only, unfortunately, John lacks the steady purpose, that settled calm, that has brought His Majesty so far. When the keynote to a man's character is recklessness, his success may be brilliant, it will hardly be lasting. My son is absolutely reckless — you marked his allusion just now to this plot he hoped to discover?"

The Viscount twisted his wry neck with a keen look at Argyll, who stammered his reply as if it had been frightened out of him.

"I — heard, my lord — he mentioned — "

"'Twas most injudicious," interrupted the Viscount smoothly. "A little more and he would have mentioned names — he might even have mentioned yours, my lord."

"Mine!" cried Argyll, stepping back.

"Absurd — is it not? — but even supposing you were in the plot, I assure you that John, knowing it, is capable of disclosing to you that it was discovered."

Argyll gave a feeble laugh. "My lord, it is no' a concern of mine — what the Jacobites may plot."

"Naturally," answered Viscount Stair. "Merely — as my son said — there are great names imperiled."

Argyll saw clearly enough that the astute old lawyer divined that he was implicated, and the Viscount, seeing it as clearly his side, waited for Argyll's nervousness to betray him further.

But the Earl's caution had kept him from giving any written pledge to the Jacobites and the knowledge of it steadied him now; he fenced warily with the Viscount's wiliness and took his leave, more hastily than ceremoniously, leaving the Viscount in a pleasant humor. The little episode

delighted him; he chuckled to himself at the thought of Argyll's face. He pictured that unfortunate gentleman's agonies as he hurried home; then his smile deepened as he saw still further. Argyll might warn the conspirators that the Master was on their track; they might take fright and escape the net spreading for them; so would the Master's labor go for nothing; the Viscount finally laughed aloud at the thought of the storm there would be when Sir John found himself outwitted; his was the temper that loves to provoke and then standing aside watch the violence aroused in others.

In these pleasant thoughts he was disturbed by the sound of the opening door and the slow entry of Lady Dalrymple.

At sight of him she hesitated.

"Where is Sir John?" she asked.

The Viscount pointed to the folding door. "In there, with my Lord Breadalbane."

She shrank away from the door as if she saw the man behind it.

"What do they talk of?" she asked heavily.

"Why, madam," he answered dryly, "what business is that of yours?"

She shook her head drearily and crossed to the window; in the gray light of the winter afternoon her face and figure showed one dull whiteness; her pale hair, her white dress and her pallor made her appear ghostlike in the somber room. A few flakes of snow were falling across the leaden sky; Lady Dalrymple stared out at the bleak square and the bare trees.

"Madam, have you no occupation?" asked the Viscount suavely.

"No," she answered, without looking round.

"There are pleasanter ways of doing nothing," he observed, "than contemplating a dreariness."

"My lord — I see nothing else — wherever I look." She turned her head and her dim blue eyes rested on him.

"An unfortunate disposition," he remarked.

She came down the room restlessly, her head hanging a little.

"Did you want to see my son?" questioned the Viscount, eying her.

"No," she answered dully.

"You merely questioned, madam, that you might avoid him?"

Lady Dalrymple lifted her head.

"Perhaps," she said, with trembling lips.

The Viscount smiled.

"Will you, madam, do me a like service?"

"What?" she asked.

"Avoid me, madam; the house is large enough."

A faint flush came into her face.

"I strive, my lord, not to trouble you."

"Madam, you are hardly successful."

"Forgive me," she said, very white again. "It is not of my doing that I am your son's wife."

The Viscount shrugged his shoulders. "I am not responsible for my son's domestic affairs — "

She turned and faced him.

"Your son is your son," she said bitterly, "and what you made him. Between you, you have goaded me into something near craziness — but you shall not dare to judge me — you who know what your son is — without pity, or charity, or any tenderness — violent beyond reason — mad!"

The Viscount looked at her straightly and smiled, and at his smile she gave him a wild look and turned hastily, as if frightened, from the room.

As the door closed behind her she shuddered, then began slowly ascending the great stairs.

So lonely, so utterly lonely! The vast house was certainly haunted; she continually glanced over her shoulder at the ghosts catching her skirts.

So lonely, so intolerably lonely! the dark pictures on the walls looked ominous and threatening; heavy shadows lurked in every corner; she began to hurry like a guilty thing, starting before every open door with a frightened glance into the empty room beyond. She came to the very top of the house; the low attics under the roof.

One of these she entered, catching her breath at her own footsteps. It was dusty, empty, this garret, yet it would seem as if some one had recently been there, for a candle in a silver stick stood on the window-ledge and a broken chair was drawn up under it; in one corner was a pile of boxes and some old pictures with their faces to the wall.

Lady Dalrymple shut the door and glided softly across the floor; her face wore a look of expectancy. She lit the candle; it cast a dim light, showing the cobwebs hanging from the ceiling and the broken plaster of the walls and throwing great shadows from the boxes in the corner.

It was bitterly cold here, but she did not seem to heed it; carefully she placed the candle so that it did not gutter in the draught, then, sinking on her knees beside them, she opened the topmost box.

Out of it with infinite care she took a large jointed doll, the waxen face beautifully modeled. It was the size of a child

and was elegantly dressed in velvet and lace; Lady Dalrymple set it on the chair and smoothed out the collar with loving fingers.

In this uncertain light the doll had a ghastly semblance of humanity; like a dumb and motionless child, its glass eyes stared at the woman kneeling at its side; the draught from the window blew its black curls to and fro in lifelike manner.

Lady Dalrymple smiled to herself and stroked the velvet coat half-timidly, then returning to the box she brought from it a work-basket and a little shirt and with these she seated herself beside the chair and began to mend the shirt where the wrist ruffle was torn.

Her delicate hand flew swiftly to and fro; for all the ill-light and the cold, her face was absorbed, almost contented. When the light task was completed, she held the garment up before the candle with a little smile; she was shuddering in the bitter draught that crept round the attic; but she did not know it; her lips moved as if she spoke to herself; she drew the doll down and removing its coat, carefully fitted on the shirt; it was too large and hung stiffly on the unbending figure; but Lady Dalrymple held the doll out at arm's length with a wistful face; then caught it to her poor empty heart and rocked it to and fro with passionate hands clasping the inanimate rag.

"Harry," her cold lips murmured, "so you used to sit — it feels like you — so — then your arms would go round my neck — slowly."

She quivered into a smile at the recollection.

"Then you would lift your face up — all soft and warm — ah, my dear — my dear — "

Her great moist eyes turned to the thing in her arms;

she saw the staring glassy eyes, the hard wax face and rose, setting it it aside.

"It is a lie," she said with the quiet of agony. "You are dead."

She laid her face against the wall and woe shook her whole body.

"God! — are these things just?" she said with clenched hands. "Is it right these things should be? — that I should live to think upon his grave?"

Her voice echoed through the bare rafters; a sudden gust of wind blew the window open and the candle out; she gave a cry of terror and rushed from the room, shutting the door behind her. At a swift regardless pace she came down the stairs till she reached a landing where a dim lamp hung.

She paused there a moment as if she had forgotten where she would go, and while she hesitated a door was opened and the Master of Stair stepped out. His wife shrank back against the wall, but he stopped and their eyes met.

He noticed her face, her fallen hair, the dust upon her dress.

"Who are you? Where have you been?" he asked, starting back.

Her side she drew herself still further away; her lips formed a half-smile; very foolish, very tragic.

He swept past her down the stairs, fiercely as though the Furies were after him; the clatter of his sword on the marble echoed through the empty house.

His wife had reminded him of his sister Janet, with her blank blue eyes, her soft white face and her curious crouching attitude, like an animal expecting the whip.

He gave a wild laugh; for that one startled moment he had

thought it was his sister, and she dead twenty years! His thoughts were wandering; he laughed again recklessly and flinging his head back, looked up.

Lady Dalrymple had come to the head of the stairs and was peering down, her hands clasped behind her — surely it was his sister — and the house was haunted as he had known — known —

So strong was the feeling that the man felt the word forming on his lips, "Janet!"

The woman suddenly broke into laughter, crazily, an echo of his own and turned away and disappeared, and the Master of Stair flung on his way with the sound of it in his ears.

CHAPTER XV

THE AVOWAL

THE afternoon service at Westminster Abbey had commenced; Delia Featherstonehaugh sat in the cloisters and listened to the lift of the singing. The place was yellow with the late sunshine; through the open arches glittered the untrodden snow under the faint blue of an English winter sky.

Save for the sound of the organ and the half-muffled singing there was such silence that the whirr past of a bird became a notable thing. Delia gazed down the shadowy cloisters into their dimness, barred with the gold of the sunshine. She noted the slender stone ribbings rising perfectly to join like hands in prayer, somewhere in the mystery of the dark roof, and the Tudor roses each with its golden counterpart on the gray flagstone, and she sighed, for no reason save the stillness of it all.

Close under her feet was the brass gravestone of a bishop, who had been dust for three hundred years; his Latin titles, shining in the sun, measured many paces; against the wall near by was a tablet to the memory of one three years dead, and this was all it bore beside her name: "Dear childe."

Faintly through the Abbey walls came the choir's singing as disembodied, as grave as angels'; Delia's hands slipped out of her muff and onto the stone beside her; her lips parted and

her head sank back against the gray old wall; under her red coat her heart was heaving passionately.

Suddenly the singing grew louder; she heard the first outburst of the Cantate Domino

"O sing unto the Lord a new song — for He hath done marvelous things."

She sat up and looked round; a man was entering the cloisters from the Abbey, as he closed the door behind him the singing sank again to faintness.

Delia sat upright, motionless, looking toward the new-comer; it was Mr. Wedderburn.

The cloister echoed to his firm footstep as he came toward her; his riding-cloak was over his arm; he swung his hat and whip in his hand; seeing her he gave a little start, then came on and halted, his figure between her and the winter sunlight:

"Delia!" he said, and he half-smiled.

She could find no words to answer him; she turned her face away and stared down at her own still hand.

"You often come here?" he asked.

"Yes."

He came nearer and leaned against the wall beside her easily, as if it were the most likely thing that they should have met thus.

"I am on my way to 'The Sleeping Queen,'" he said, "to see your brother — but I have time upon my hands."

She looked up at him; the sunshine touched his face and his plain dark attire.

He smiled again.

"Will you be sorry when I leave for France?" he said.

The brown eyes widened.

"Why do you ask?" she murmured faintly.

"My faith — I wondered."

"Why, sir, do you, can you care whether it matters to me or no?" cried Delia, a little wildly.

"Yes, I care," he answered.

There was a pause; the singing had ceased. Delia bent her head and rested unseeing eyes upon the bishop's tombstone.

"You take, sir, a curious tone for a stranger," she said at last.

"I would not have us strangers, Delia — did not you say the same King, the same faith, the same cause?"

She turned as some one standing on defense.

"What do you mean?"

A slight smile crossed his face; it might have been sadness or contempt; he leaned heavily against the Abbey wall and his shadow was over Delia.

"What do I mean?" he repeated; he looked at her in a very gentle manner. "I mean I should like to be in your thoughts sometimes — "

She rose, and her muff fell unnoticed between them.

"Am I in yours?" she asked slowly.

"You have the sweetest face I have ever met," he said quietly, "Is it likely I should forget you?"

She went very pale and put her hands together in a bewildered way; he surveyed her gravely with a half-sad interest, standing very much at his ease and carelessly while she was tense and painfully still.

"Delia," he smiled. "Delia."

She stepped back.

"What is it you want with me?" she said.

He moved from his place. "Do you care for me?" he asked. "Could you ever care for me?"

She fell back before him. "Oh, why do you ask?" she cried.

His eyes rested on her with a curious expression as of yearning.

"Because I care for you," he answered. "Don't you understand, Delia?"

The first notes of the anthem were sounding through the silence as she answered faintly:

"It cannot be you mean this. . . ."

She sat down heavily and clasped her trembling hands very tightly.

"Well — but if I did mean it?" he inquired.

"If you did mean it?" she whispered, looking up. "Ah, if you did mean it —"

Her voice died away, she sat silent as if terrified; and now the sun left him and lay behind her head halo-wise and sparkled in her brown eyes.

Mr. Wedderburn, looking very intently down at her, bent a little nearer.

"Sweetheart — ye shall answer me," he said. "Nay, ye shall —"

"Ah, what will you force me to say?" she answered desperately. "What do you want?"

He bent till the ringlets on his breast touched her shoulder; he very delicately smiled into her pale face.

"Delia, answer me."

"Ah, my heart, I cannot!" she cried, with wild eyes on his face.

"Surely I am answered," said Mr. Wedderburn, and a slight flush passed over his pallor. "Surely you think of me as I of you, Delia —"

With a little cry she rose up against the wall.

"Indeed, I love you," she said, breathing hard. "Ah, indeed — indeed —"

Then she sank down again, hiding her face in her fluttering hands.

He looked at her curiously, his lips touched with his little lazy half-smile.

"I do not deserve it, Delia," he said; then in a strange voice: "You and I — by such ways to this! You and I — look up and speak to me."

She dropped her hands and looked at him.

"I may speak," she said hoarsely, "but never shall I tell how utterly I love you — beyond all reason — all measure. Ah, since I first saw you the world has stopped about me, and there has been nothing but this one thought of you!"

He caught his breath.

"Why — are these things possible?" he asked. "And you do not know me."

She rose and turned to him in a triumphant passion, her hand lightly on her heart.

"No, I only love you," she said. "And that makes it seem as if you had been one with my life from the first. Ah, can you think of time?"

"God knows, of nothing," he answered; he held his ungloved hand out as if to take hers, but she fell back.

"Ah, don't touch me," she said unsteadily. "Not yet — not yet. I am so happy, that I am afraid, and if you touch me you may break the spell, and my dream go away."

He laughed gently.

"But this is no dream, sweetheart, do you not hear the anthem yonder in the church? And all around us the graves? There are no graves in dreams."

"Nor surely often such joy on earth," whispered Delia. "As mine — as mine — yet what have I said? Shame should hold me silent — but you have disarmed me and laid me defenseless at your feet — ah, leave me, for I have said too much!"

He laid his hand very lightly on her shoulder.

"You make mine unworthiness a heavy thing," he said somberly. "If you are sincere — Delia —"

She thought he doubted her, and her pure face paled and flushed.

"Alas! you had not said that had I been silent longer," she cried. "You carried my heart too soon to value it — yet if you love me —"

"Delia — if I love you?"

"You will not doubt that my very soul is yours — ah, Heaven — forever!"

"I wonder," he said musingly. "Nay, do not turn your face away, for it is lovely to look upon — and mine — you say forever."

"Yes," she said trembling.

He seated himself beside her and took her cold hands in his; this time she did not resist; complete silence was about them; the Abbey service was over; long shadows filled the cloisters and the sunlight had faded to a mere stain on the wall. Loose gray clouds sped over the sky, and a chill little wind blew in and out the arches.

Delia rose, drawing her hand away, her face was hidden under the shadow of her hat, her figure a shadow among shadows. He rose beside her; his footfall echoed through the emptiness.

"My sweet child," he said, in a voice fallen very low and soft.

She turned without a word and her head lifted slowly, he saw her eyes were glittering with tears.

"Kiss me," he said gently.

She shrank back.

"Ah, no," she pleaded. "Not that — I love you so —" her voice fell brokenly. "I mean — I —"

"Why, surely, you may kiss me, Delia?" he answered.

Further still into the shadows she withdrew.

"Love is not kisses," she said faintly.

"Some think so, Delia," he smiled.

"I — I would not," she faltered.

He picked up his hat and whip.

"Sweetheart — I must go."

"Yes," she said softly. "But I have the thought of you, which is company enough."

He looked at her a moment through the twilight.

"Now will that thought last till next we meet?" he asked.

"Why you know," she said wonderingly, "do we not love each other?"

"Yet you will not kiss me?"

She drooped again in shyness.

"I have said enough — without," she murmured.

"Then, Delia — farewell."

She glanced at him timidly.

"I — do not use your name," she whispered. "And yet I know it and yet I am afraid — and know not —"

"Why, you shall call me by it now," he answered. "And next time it shall be nothing else — John."

"John!" she echoed, bewildered. "But your name is Andrew."

He stared a second, then laughed.

"But those I love do use my second name."

"Yet I mislike it," she said. "And ever in my thoughts you are Andrew."

"Why do you mislike the name of John?" he asked.

"It is linked for me with the Master of Stair," said Delia. "He is our enemy and hateful to me — I would not call you by the name of that accursed man."

"Then call me what you will," he answered swiftly. "There are strange names you will use to me yet — God knows! Farewell!"

"Ah, stay — for I have something to say," she whispered.

He stopped, waiting; they stood in so dark a shadow that she could only see the outline of his figure.

"About the Macdonalds of Glencoe," she said. "I would ask you to help me save them."

Her voice fell very tenderly.

"I have a great reason to wish to save them," she continued. "There is one among them whom I thought — ah, I thought —" She laughed happily — "I thought I cared for till I met you — no one knew — but I believed I cared — yet it was only pity and loneliness — yet did I vow to save him — and now — do not you see? Out of loyalty to that old vow of mine, I am pledged to save him still."

He was silent. She drew timidly a little closer.

"You understand?" she asked anxiously.

"I understand," he said gloomily. "That you should ask me! I have no power."

"'Twill be a service to the King," she answered. "Ah, as you love me —"

He took the words from her lips.

"As I love you, I will do it," he said recklessly. "Now will you kiss me?"

She held out her hands.

"If you ask it," she said passionately.

He took her hands in his and stared down into her surrendered face; then suddenly let her go.

"No," he said, "I will wait till you do offer it. Farewell."

He turned away abruptly into the darkness.

She listened to his footsteps till they had died into the distance, then she turned and went slowly toward the Abbey.

She entered it on tiptoe; there were lights burning on the altar, but it was empty; she passed lightly down the chancel till she reached the door that led into the little chapel of St. Faith. With hushed heart she entered; here she could think she was in a church undefiled by another faith; the reformer's hand had passed this corner by; two candles burnt on the low altar; the air was close and heavy; from the dark walls leaned wild angel face with parted lips and blown-back hair, as if they strained out of the stone to cry aloud to those beneath.

Delia sank to her knees on the stone floor, and her fingers fumbled with the rosary at her breast. She was uplifted, carried out of herself; as though those candles could burn forever, till the angels' heads should speak and bursting from their stone, pull the church about them in a great shout for judgment. Delia felt her senses swoon within her; she shook and shuddered as she knelt.

"Ah, God, make me worthy of that man's love!" she prayed passionately. "For I have not deserved this happiness!"

CHAPTER XVI

A LAMPOON ANSWERED

MR. WEDDERBURN entered the parlor of "The Sleeping Queen," true to his appointed time.

He found alone, and busily writing, Sir Perseus, who greeted him cordially in his pleasant, blunt manner.

Mr. Caryl, he said, had been summoned by his grace of Berwick, but he expected his return shortly, and though he, Sir Perseus, actually had the papers Mr. Wedderburn was to carry to France, it would be better if the emissary would wait and see Mr. Caryl.

Mr. Wedderburn gave a short answer and flung himself into the chair by the fire; he was obviously in an ill-humor.

Sir Perseus talked of the plot and the promising prospects of success; he praised Mr. Caryl's vast labor and skill in the cause of King James, and hinted that the time was not far distant when the devotion of His Majesty's adherents would be rewarded by seeing him enjoy his own again.

Mr. Wedderburn briefly assented to these remarks and stared moodily into the fire.

Once they were interrupted by the entrance of the printer, who laid down a packet of pamphlets and silently withdrew.

Sir Perseus began sorting them.

"Delia is late," he remarked. "You may have seen her if you came through the Abbey — she often goes there."

"Yes, I saw her," answered Mr. Wedderburn gloomily. "Mr. Caryl, too, is late."

"Are you pressed for time?" asked Sir Perseus.

The other glanced at the clock.

"The boat is to call for me to-morrow noon," he said, "and I have to get to Romney — a delay would be impolitic."

"It will be unnecessary," answered Sir Perseus readily. "I have the papers — I am sure Mr. Caryl would see the desirability of your running no risk of delay."

He went to a box in the corner, unlocked it and lifted out a flat leathern case.

Mr. Wedderburn turned in his chair and watched him as he brought it to the table and showed the contents.

"This, sir —" Sir Perseus laid a bulky sealed packet down, "is the letter to His Majesty from his supporters in England, assuring him of their aid should he land an English army — it is what he asked for to show Louis."

"It contains the names of all the conspirators?" asked Mr. Wedderburn.

"We have all, from the highest to the humblest, signed it," was the answer, given with a smile of satisfaction. "It should please his Majesty and satisfy Louis. This is Mr. Caryl's letter and report to the King — this the Duke of Berwick's — these three papers are all, Mr. Wedderburn."

"Deadly enough, were they discovered," commented the other, dryly.

"We are confident that His Majesty selected a messenger who would see they were not discovered," said Sir Perseus, putting the papers back into their case.

Mr. Wedderburn gave a sudden laugh and rose. "Sir, my life upon their safe delivery to — the King."

"Sir — it is a weighty trust," answered Sir Perseus gravely. "The lives and honors of many men — the fate of a kingdom."

Mr. Wedderburn made no answer and presently he began to pace the room in a manner that at last attracted the other's attention; he began to look at him curiously; he noticed that the King's messenger appeared absorbed, gloomy, as if he reined in high passions, that his face was unnaturally pale and shadowed under his brilliant eyes as if he had been through great pain or sleeplessness. Sir Perseus studied him covertly, with a growing uneasiness; he did not look like a man in the mood to undertake a difficult enterprise.

Mr. Wedderburn meanwhile continued walking heavily to and fro, as if utterly careless of the impression he might make. It grew late; Sir Perseus expressed a wish that Mr. Caryl might return.

"It matters not — I have a good horse without," said Mr. Wedderburn, and fell into his silence again.

A strange and utterly undefinable sense of distrust and fear came over Sir Perseus; his hand went out and instinctively covered the leathern case while he eyed his restless companion. The longer he watched this silent man and noted his lithe strength, his brooding face, his reckless pose and his strange, wild eyes, the more his unreasoning fear increased; he began to long for the return of Jerome Caryl, to resolve that he would not part with the papers until that return.

Mr. Wedderburn broke the silence by ringing the bell and calling for wine. When it came they drank together in a curious heavy stillness, as if both knew something was impending, yet could not speak of it.

Mr. Wedderburn drained his glass in a kind of fierce haste,

then fell again to his pacing, the other watching intent and tense.

It struck eight.

Neither remarked on the passing of the time; the man at the table slipped the leathern case into the breast of his coat, why, he could not have told, save that he felt unnerved.

Mr. Wedderburn came at last to a sudden stand on the hearth, the firelight full on his handsome face.

"What do you write?" he asked.

"Pamphlets — lampoons —" was the answer.

"Ah — on whom?"

"Naturally — the Williamites."

"And you circulate them?"

"Successfully — into Kensington, itself."

"You are daring — and fortunate," frowned Mr. Wedderburn.

Sir Perseus looked at him with an honest, puzzled face; he could neither understand the man nor his own sense of uneasiness.

"What are these?" asked the other, and crossed to the table; his rich dark presence coming so close, still further impressed Sir Perseus with an uuaccountable feeling of mistrust.

"Ah, those are lampoons on the Master of Stair," he answered. "We find him a fine target."

Mr. Wedderburn's eyes flashed; he poured out more wine and drank it slowly.

"The Master of Stair!" he said. "I have heard a great deal of the Master of Stair," he gave a half-smile, "Now what have you to say of him?"

He set his glass down and Sir Perseus marked his strong shapely hand as it lay round the stem.

"Come," the other insisted in an imperious manner, leaning a little across the table, "let me hear your skill in lampoons."

"I do not write them — I merely collect the materials."

"So they are true ?"

"God knows, one needs not to invent lies of the Master of Stair."

Mr. Wedderburn's azure eyes narrowed into a steady look; he leaned forward, his arms folded on the table; there was a little smile on his curved lips.

"Read this same lampoon to me," he said. " 'Twill pass the time till Mr. Caryl comes —"

Sir Perseus felt as one fumbling in the dark; he could not make this Wedderburn out; awed, spite of uneasiness and fascinated through all his watchful mistrust, he decided that the best thing was to wait; he put his hand over the papers on his breast.

"Why — as you say — it will pass the time," he answered. "Yet it is foolish doggerel — serving only to sting our enemies.

"And the truth, you say ?"

"Else it would not sting."

And Sir Perseus picked up the topmost printed sheet and unfolded it; Mr. Wedderburn fixed upon him his brilliant eyes.

Sir Perseus glanced at the clock, then commenced reading in his pleasant, even voice:

Of all these men who make the laws,
That they may easy break the laws,
I know no knaves I could compare
With the brood begot by the Viscount Stair.

"A bold beginning," remarked Mr. Wedderburn.

Sir Perseus continued:

Of all this race by Heaven cursed,
John, is the eldest and the worst,
A specious knave, whose end will be
A-dancing on the gallows-tree.

He paused, thinking he heard a footstep.

"Go on," smiled Mr. Wedderburn.

There is no deed he would not do
Or readily put his hand thereto
So he might gain this world's gear,
Scruples knows he not nor fear.
Born was he of a witch from Hell,
And Satan knew his father well,
A hideous curse is on his name,
Deep has he drunk of every shame —

Sir Perseus interrupted himself: "Hardly very witty," he remarked, "but it impresses the people it goes among."

"Go on," was the brief rejoinder.

Sir Perseus caught at the means of filling time that dragged.

His only sister miserably died
A mad and an unwilling bride,
Her husband she did try to slay,
The devil snatched her clear away
And tore her raving limb from limb,
Long had she sold her soul to him —

Mr. Wedderburn suddenly clenched his hand on the table, his eyes were very dark, his face very pale.

"Fine matter for your hawkers to shout and the gutter scum to read," he said thickly, "Go on."

His brother, seeing clear his end,
(Indeed he knew that God would send
The same unto them all)
Vowed he would Jack Ketch forestall
And so himself he hanged.

Sir Perseus paused to turn the paper, glancing up he noticed the face of the man opposite. "Sir," he asked curiously, "why do you so look at me?"

"For what reason save interest," answered Mr. Wedderburn, in no way altering his steady gaze. "Will you not continue?"

"If it interests you," Sir Perseus spoke uneasily. "Mr. Caryl is late."

"An unpardonable fault," cried the other imperiously. "But I pray you — continue this pleasant reading." He pushed his chair from the table, his right hand had slipped to his sword-hilt he was leaning back very easily, yet something about him made Sir Perseus hesitate, yet impelled to fill the pause, he recommenced:

His children, were devils born
Who laughed God to scorn
Once, in childish play,
One did the other slay.
Their father came, and smiled to see,
The red blood run so merrily.
Think you it gave HIM pain
To see his son a second Cain?

Sir Perseus paused, watchful of his companion, but Mr. Wedderburn sat very quietly; as though indeed he was not listening. Sir Perseus, however, preferred passing the time in reading rather than in further conversation; with a fervent, silent wish for Jerome Caryl, he droned on:

His wife too felt little grief
Or else she quickly found relief —
For her youngest newly dead
A merry life she led
And did her consolation take

In loving of a Hell-cat rake
A man with all the vices rife
A lover fit for the Master's wife —

"A moment, sir."

Mr. Wedderburn leaned forward in a manner, that, although still quiet, stopped Sir Perseus instantly.

"Where do you get your information, sir?" he asked.

Sir Perseus put down the pamphlet.

"Why, from common talk," he said.

"Common talk!" cried the other in a strange voice, "so these things are common talk! And this last of your gutter lies, is that common, too?"

"So common, sir, that you should know it," answered Sir Perseus, firing. "'Tis public property, God knows."

Mr. Wedderburn's intense eyes never lost their steadiness; he spoke in the same suppressed voice:

"I have never heard anything against the fair name of Lady Dalrymple," he said.

Sir Perseus, angered and bewildered, gave a short laugh.

"You've lived too long in France, sir, or you would know that Sir John Dalrymple's wife is no better than the rest of his family — and that Tom Wharton — "

Mr. Wedderburn rose so abruptly that Sir Perseus sprang also to his feet, like a man suddenly seeing danger.

"What of Mr. Wharton?" demanded Mr. Wedderburn softly.

"What are these demands?" cried Sir Perseus hotly. "Why are you championing the Whigs?"

"No matter for that," interrupted the other. "I ask you — what of Mr. Wharton?"

Sir Perseus shrugged his shoulders.

"Sir, you want it put too plainly — what of my Lady Sunderland and Mr. Sidney belike, you've heard that tale — even in France? And the part the Earl takes — a common situation among these canting Whigs."

Mr. Wedderburn came a step nearer.

"Do you couple that woman's name with that of Lady Dalrymple," he said unsteadily. "Even in your foul libels?"

Sir Perseus flushed angrily.

"What brief have you in this cause? Lady Dalrymple cannot shrink from the Countess's company. As I said, the situation is the same — Tom Wharton is as worthless a rake as Harry Sidney — and as fortunate a lover,— while Sir John is as complacent a husband as the Earl — "

Mr. Wedderburn leaned forward and struck the speaker on the breast with his clenched hand so fiercely that he staggered and almost fell, struck him with such fury and unrestrained passion that he gave a cry, thinking a madman attacked him, struck him with his hand and then with his crumpled glove full on his wincing face.

"You bring your lies to the wrong market, you Papist cur!" he said hoarsely. "I am John Dalrymple and I stand here to refute your cursed slanders!"

He flung aside his gloves and cloak and his sword sprang out in the candle-light.

"My God!" whispered Sir Perseus, reeling against the wall with a sick face.

The Master of Stair came toward him; his bared sword glittering as it shook to the quick breathing of his fury.

"You!" he said with mad eyes, dark and narrow. "You — the Frenchman's spy — the priest's tool — the mouthpiece

of the scandals of the gutter — you, to drag my name through the mire to make a party cry!"

Sir Perseus drew himself together desperately.

"John Dalrymple!" he cried. "You have betrayed yourself too soon — by God you have!"

"No," said the Master of Stair, advancing on him. "Think you I need to use craft — to get those papers from you?"

"Not while I live," answered Sir Perseus firmly, and he made a step toward the door.

But the Master of Stair stood before it.

"Will you cry for help?" he demanded. "It will make no difference. The poor knaves here cannot aid you — "

Sir Perseus stepped impulsively back and drew.

"I think you threw — spy at me," he said through his teeth. "What word then for you — you thief of men's confidence?"

On this last word their swords rose and clashed.

"Did you think," breathed Sir John passionately, above the sword play, "that we had not men that would do for England what you do for France — did you not reckon that we might risk and dare something to keep what we had now — as well as you to regain what you had lost — did you think we were fools or cowards? You and your crew of broken schemers — you and your damned French king — ah!" He was rapidly forcing his adversary back against the wall. Sir Perseus's hurried defense could not cope with the fury of his attack; he was the stronger man, the better swordsman; Sir Perseus backed desperately into the window-seat.

"Fools we've been — fools," he muttered, white-lipped.

"Yes, fools," flashed the Master of Stair. "To think you could fit the Pope's yoke about England's neck again or give

us back a King of follies we flung to make Europe sport — so —"

Their swords crossed close to the hilt; Sir Perseus slipped and fell to his knees in the shadows of the window.

"Sir — on your knees — " said Sir John. "Take back your lies — "

Sir Perseus, desperate, tried to catch at the descending sword, tried to rise, to cry out, but Sir John's thrust went through his feeble guard and his blade quivered at his throat.

"Which King?" cried the Master of Stair. "Which cause? And what think you now of Lady Dalrymple's champion?"

With that Sir Perseus struggled up, slipped forward and the point of the Master's sword went a hand's-breadth into his breast.

He went heavily onto his side and Sir John stepped back, elate and passionate; slipping his sword back with a lift of his shoulders.

"Do you see me, Jacobite?" he said scornfully. "Do you see this?"

He snatched up the pamphlets, three or four at a time, and thrust them into the candle flame. As they flared up in his hand he flung them on the hearth and set his heel on the ashes; he turned, looked at the prone man.

"Do you see?" he repeated. "Do you see, dog, what I make of your work?"

Sir Perseus made a faint movement.

The Master of Stair flung the last papers onto the fire, then crossed to his prostrate enemy.

"I might have kept you for Tyburn — where your friends will go," he said, looking down at him with the candle in his hand. "The friends whose names you have in that paper — "

He dropped to one knee and turned Sir Perseus over; at this the Jacobite moaned and clutched his fingers together.

Sir John smiled as he drew the leathern case from the blood-stained shirt.

"I have your plot in the hollow of my hand," said the Master of Stair, and flashed the candle into the ashy face of Sir Perseus, who stared up speechlessly.

"You!" he said, still at the white heat of his fury, "you would sell us to the French! You would utter foul lies of me and mine! My God, Jacobite, I would you might live to be hanged!"

He crossed to the table and opened the case; it contained the three papers untouched; with flashing eyes he examined them; then called over his shoulder to the shadowy window-seat.

"Do you see me, Jacobite dog?"

From the shadow came a faint voice, a little cry.

"Delia!"

Sir John stood arrested.

"Delia," whispered the dying man again.

Sir John stared in his direction; his high flush faded, he started a little.

"Of course — her brother," he murmured. For a moment he stood still, gazing at the dark outline now still upon the floor.

"I love you utterly," the words came again as distinctly in his ear as if she breathed them, "one creed — one King — one cause — "

He roused himself with a reckless laugh; caught up the papers, his hat and gloves and flinging open the window, stepped out into the street.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BITTERNESS OF DEATH

DELIA FEATHERSTONEHAUGH came home through the quiet dark streets by the river with a heart so elate that she heeded nothing of the lateness of the hour, the bitter little wind that whistled through the houses or the slow falling snow.

A clock striking nine told her that she had lingered in the Abbey longer than she thought, but what did that matter to-night? Perseus would forgive her when she told him.

She smiled up at the bleak sky and quickened her pace.

At the corner of a street she noticed an old beggar huddled against a house; she stopped under the lamp and took out her purse, emptying all its little silver into the astonished beggar's palm; she felt that she had come into great riches; she was so happy, the joy within was inexhaustible; she felt she could have played the prodigal with it and still have the lightest heart in the world.

The old man called a garrulous blessing after her and she turned lightly with a dazzling smile, then hurried on down the street.

There was no one abroad; the stillness of the snow lay over everything; every tenth house alone showed a lamp and between the way was in perfect darkness; yet Delia found in this dreariness only a strangeness that heightened the ecstasy of her divine elation. As she turned into the courtyard of "The

Sleeping Queen" she saw Jerome Caryl dismounting by the light of the ostler's lanthorn.

"Mr. Caryl!" she cried with an impulsive desire to speak to some one.

He turned. "Why, you are out late," he said abstractedly; he looked pale and anxious had Delia had eyes for that, but she followed him into the house and into the front parlor in a smiling silence. A serving man set a lamp upon the table and Jerome Caryl flung him his hat and whip; then glanced at Delia.

"Why, what has happened?" he asked, struck through his absorption with her transfigured face. She stood behind the lamp, her hands resting on the edge of the table and her head a little thrown back; her hazel curls lay over the open collar of her red coat and her eyes shone softly brilliant as misted fires.

"Ah, Jerome," she said, trembling passionately. "Ah, I feel above humanity to-night!"

He looked at her, his melancholy eyes a little wide with wonder.

"Tell me —" he asked.

Blushing, breathing fast, she drew back with low laughter. "Ah — not yet — I must tell Perseus first."

"I, too, have somewhat to tell Perseus," said Jerome Caryl; he went to the door and called to the servant. "Is Mr. Wedderburn here?"

"Yes," came the answer. "He is, sir, in the back parlor with Sir Perseus —"

Jerome Caryl returned to the table.

"I have been detained," he said. "Berwick had heard from Argyll — a letter in bad cipher — it hinted that the government knew something."

Delia would not be disturbed by this to-night — not to-night. Misfortune or the hint of misfortune was unbelievable to-night.

"My Lord Argyll is over fearful," she said, with smiling eyes.

Jerome Caryl looked at her curiously; he had never seen her thus: gloriously smiling, triumphantly glowing with joyous high spirits; she was beautiful to-night with the beauty of great happiness; she caught his glance and laughed and blushed; her hand upon the door.

"Perseus will be a-rating us both for this lateness," she said, her bosom heaving as if she had been swiftly running.

She opened the door and stepped lightly over the threshold, then paused, still smiling, but a little wondering. The window opposite was set wide open; of the two candles on the table one had been blown out by the rising wind, the other had guttered and the wax dripped forlornly down the stick onto the table; the fire had fallen to a few smoldering embers.

"There is no one here," said Delia marveling.

Yet the room did not seem empty; she felt that there was some one there, and peered forward into the shadows.

"Perseus!" she cried.

As she advanced she noticed the ashes and charred scraps of paper lying about the hearth: she stopped abruptly.

"Perseus!" she said again, but her voice was less confident and her smile had faded; she looked at the table where she had left her brother writing; there were his inkstand, his pen, wine and glasses on a tray; his chair pushed back and another one knocked over; over this hung a man's riding-cloak — and not her brother's —

Whose — then — whose?

She picked up the flaring candle and held it over the fallen chair.

Mr. Wedderburn's cloak — she had seen him in it an hour ago.

She turned across the room, the candle shook and dripped in her hand.

"Jerome!" she said faintly, "Jerome!"

He was in the doorway.

"Where are they?" he asked swiftly.

She was nearing the window; the candle cast a ragged light through the shadows.

"Jerome —" she whispered fast and fearfully. "Come here — there is something here —"

Backing against the wall she stared down at the window-seat.

"God!" she shrieked suddenly. "It is a man!" The candle clattered from her slack fingers to the floor; the room was in complete darkness. Delia turned wildly through the blackness and caught Jerome Caryl's arm.

"Who is it?" she cried. "Whom do you think it can be? Nay, answer me — could it be — he? Ah, no, my God — it is not possible —"

"Hush! hush!" said Jerome gently. "I must get a light."

"No, no, I could not bear to look," she shuddered wildly. "I will not bear it — why should you ask me to? It was his cloak —"

Jerome tenderly disengaged her hand.

"Take courage," he said. "If it should be Perseus he may not be — he may be — living."

She let him go; her hands fell to her sides.

"Perseus," she echoed vaguely. "Do you think it might be Perseus?"

She turned and crept along the wall; falling to her knees, she put her hands out through the dark, feeling blindly for what she knew was there.

"Andrew, Andrew," she said crazily — "Ah!" She drew back, for she had touched something — something soft — velvet — a velvet sleeve — she pressed her face against the wall, her hands over it, and her fallen hair, and when Jerome reëntered with a lantern she did not look up.

He crossed at once to the window, holding the light; it revealed her crouching away with hidden face and close beside her Sir Perseus, full on his back, his hands clutched in his disordered clothes, as if his last act had been the defense of something he had hidden in his breast. "Now here is an end of thy work," said Jerome quietly.

He set the lantern on the window-seat and sinking on his knees, lifted Sir Perseus someway from the floor. "Delia — bring me the wine," he said. "I think he still breathes —"

She slowly turned a wild face.

"So — it is Perseus —" she said, staring.

"Bring the wine —" said Jerome Caryl.

Mechanically and heavily, she obeyed him; poured it out and handed it. "So it is Perseus," she repeated.

"I think we are betrayed," said Jerome Caryl evenly. "Now, who was it?" He laid his hand over the heart of the wounded man; then forced some wine between his lips.

"Dead?" asked Delia. "Is he dead — dead?"

"Hush!" whispered Jerome Caryl; for the man in his arms had stirred; he bent his head to catch some whisper.

Sir Perseus moved.

"Who was it?" asked Jerome Caryl. "And the papers?"

Bending close he caught a few struggling breaths. "I did my — best — I did —" Then with the effort of speaking, the blood rushed to the man's mouth, choking him, his staring eyes fixed in an agony on the calm face bending over him.

"The Master of Stair," he gasped, with a ghastly effort and, rolling over, sank out of Jerome Caryl's arms.

"What does he mean?" sobbed Delia. "Has he been murdered? What has happened — is he dead?"

Jerome Caryl looked up at her.

"Yes," he said briefly, "and the man who slew him has those papers."

Delia reeled forward into the room and sat down heavily at the table, her face blank, her fingers at her mouth; there was everything on the table as it had been; the familiar things of common use about the room — what had happened that it was all so strange? Nothing — what could happen? It seemed as if her heart had stopped; all she felt was a little tired wonder. She was roused by a light touch on her arm, and looked up dully into Jerome Caryl's face.

He lifted her hand from the table.

"For his sake," he said very softly, "Call up your courage now —"

She stared with an unchanged look.

"Is he dead?" she said. "Perseus?"

"God help thee," he answered, and his voice broke a little. "We are all undone —"

"But — Perseus?" she repeated. "Is he dead? Can't he see me? Won't he hear me when I tell him — why — what was I going to tell him? When I came home I sang for joy, oh, my love, my love!" She dropped her head, sobbing heavily.

"Come and comfort me," she cried between her bitter tears. "I only want you — ah, I would have told him — dead — what is it to be dead?"

She looked up.

Jerome Caryl had left her; she rose and crept slowly to where her brother lay with Jerome's handkerchief across his face.

"Perseus —" she sobbed, "I was so happy — dear — I wanted to make you happy, too — he loves me! Perseus — do you hear?"

She bent lower.

"Will you never know now?" she asked fearfully. "But he shall avenge you — he loves me! Oh, Perseus, cannot the wonder of it make you rise and speak to me?"

A moment she listened with stilled breath, then slowly she shrank back from the still and stiffened figure on the floor.

"Andrew —" she whispered pitifully, then her gaze fell on his cloak and she caught it up to her breast for comfort. Suddenly Jerome Caryl entered; a little paper showed in his hand; his face was strongly moved.

"It is explained!" he cried passionately, "that damned devil has undone us utterly — see what has come from the man Hunt — in prison in Romney — he contrived to send this. Look at it — fated fools we are!" He held out to her a soiled scrap of crumpled paper; her wild eyes fell to it and she read in scrawling characters:

"Mr. Andrew Wedderburn is the Master of Stair."

She made no movement, spoke no word; Jerome Caryl thought that, in her grief, she was careless as to what this could mean.

"He has those papers," he said fiercely. "He must have those papers — Perseus died defending them —"

"Perseus — died?" she said. "He — killed — Perseus?"

"What else?" cried Jerome Caryl. "For what was he here? It all proves it — Argyll's warning — Hunt's message — and that —"

He pointed to Perseus and her eyes followed his gesture; she was standing very stiffly, her hand resting on the table edge.

"It is a lie," she said, "a monstrous lie."

"It is the bitter truth and we are ruined."

"No, it is a fearful lie," said Delia slowly. "I *know* it is a lie."

Jerome Caryl made no answer; he was bending over the charred papers on the hearth.

"These might be they," he said, looking up and across at the dead man. "Now what would I not give for one word from you — one word, yes — or no —"

Delia gave no hint; she stepped forward suddenly and faced Jerome.

"Tell me," she asked. "What did you say just now? What was that paper — show it to me." Her voice sank to an intense appeal.

"Ah — show it to me," she cried hoarsely.

He looked at her in a quick pity.

"Forgive me — I have been blunt — poor soul, 'tis terrible for you," he said gently.

She took no notice of his words; with the same set face she came closer and caught hold of his sleeve.

"What was it?" she said in a frozen voice. "Some lie rang in my head — something too horrible — Jerome — what have

I ever done that you should so torture me — will you not tell me?"

So strange was her voice, so disconnected and yet intensely earnest were her words, that Caryl feared for her reason.

"Delia," he said pityingly. "I would do anything to comfort thee — yet I can give thee no hope — he is dead."

"Yes!" she cried frantically. "But who killed him?"

"This man — this devilish villain — the Master of Stair —"

"The Master of Stair!" she echoed, clinging to him desperately. "What has he to do with us; we do not know him — I have never seen him —"

"Nay — he called himself Andrew Wedderburn —"

"No — no," she whispered thickly, "that is not true, and you shall say so. My God! It is not ture. I am mad and all the world is chaos if that is true — "

"I know it as if I had seen him do it," he answered. "What did your brother say — the Master of Stair!"

"No! no! he did not!" shrieked Delia.

"Did they not tell us he was in this room with Perseus — did he not quit by the window in such haste that he left his cloak — there at your feet?"

His cloak! His cloak that she had clutched to her heart for comfort — this to be cited at evidence against him — "

"I say it could not be!" she cried; she put her hands before her face as if fire had suddenly struck her blind and cowered and shrank together.

Gently Jerome Caryl put her into the chair by the desolate hearth.

"We must leave here at once," he said. "I must send a warning to Berwick and destroy the printing-press and all

papers — there is a kingdom hanging on our prudence now."

She looked at him blankly.

"The Master of Stair," she muttered. "The Master of Stair."

She drew herself together in the chair and, half-swooning, dreams mounted to her brain; reality ebbed away; she was conscious of feeling cold and yet when she put her hand to her forehead she seemed to touch fire; she thought the Abbey was about her, the sunlight at her feet, and — he — stood on the bishop's grave — "call me John," he said — Sir John Dalrymple, Master of Stair — she repeated the names to herself — it was written in large characters: "Mr. Wedderburn is the Master of Stair" — how they lied! Where was Jerome Caryl?

There were people passing, carrying something — it was the Abbey and a funeral — she was so happy that she could weep for them — death was curious — irrevocable — irrevocable.

It was Perseus they carried past. They came so heavily — so slowly; one of his hands hung out and touched the floor.

Perseus — dead.

She rose up and looked at him.

"Dead! Who slew him?"

From infinite distance seemed to come the answer

"The Master of Stair."

"Dead! my brother — who killed him?"

"The Master of Stair."

She fell face downwards across the chair and still through her unconsciousness came:

"Who killed him?"

"The Master of Stair."

CHAPTER XVIII

AN INNOCENT BETRAYAL

VISCOUNT STAIR listened with an amused smile to the heavy footsteps pacing about overhead; he drew himself closer over the fire and surveyed his lean fingers with eyes twinkling unpleasantly. His son was evidently in an ill-humor; his restlessness had followed on a message from my Lord Breadalbane; something was amiss in Scotland.

So the Viscount concluded; he made no attempt to discover what had occurred, but waited patiently, hugging his amusement, confident that his son would not leave him long out of his councils. And even sooner than he had expected the door was flung open and Sir John entered, stormy and frowning.

"Ill news from Scotland?" asked the Viscount indifferently.

His son gave him a look.

"The Macdonalds *have* taken the oaths," he answered briefly.

"Ah — more prudence among these savages than one might have expected," remarked the Viscount.

"Their prudence will not avail!" cried Sir John.

"They did not come in till the sixth of January."

"How ill-considered!" said the Viscount.

Sir John sat down heavily.

"Breadalbane has sent me the whole tale," he said. "It

seems Makian took fright when he saw the others going in and set out for Fort William to take the oaths — of course (as the old fool fortunately did not know) the oaths must be administered to a magistrate, Hill, I said Hill was untrustworthy — Hill gave him a letter to the sheriff of Argyllshire. Makian started for Inverary, but did not reach it till the sixth — God knows why."

"Probably through making himself drunk at every hut he passed," remarked the Viscount.

"He pleaded the excuse of heavy snow-storms," said Sir John, "and the sheriff was actually moved by his whinings to administer the oath."

"It will make the Macdonalds feel secure," remarked his father. "I think that is fortunate."

"But the sheriff has sent a letter to the council at Edinburgh with an account of the whole transaction."

"Need it ever reach them?" asked the Viscount. "I think if it is privately submitted to me I can cancel it — what is an oath of surrender taken on the sixth? Nothing."

Sir John rose.

"It shall make no difference," he said gloomily. "I will make an example of them, whether they took the oath or no — but this must be kept from the King."

"Which reminds me," interrupted the Viscount easily, "what of those Jacobite papers you were to put before His Majesty? It is a good many days since you announced them as in your hands."

Sir John's blue eyes lifted steadily. "I am waiting for the conspirators so embroil themselves further," he said thoughtfully.

The Viscount shrugged his shoulders.

"You are giving them a chance to leave the kingdom."

"You mistake, my lord — I am having them watched and Hunt's cottage no longer stands their refuge." He rose and abruptly left the room.

Hardly had he gone before an inner door was opened and Lady Dalrymple entered.

The Viscount gave her a sharp look.

"One might be tempted to think that you played the spy, madam," he said dryly.

"I?" she went white, but glanced at him scornfully. "Can *I* spy in my husband's house?"

"I grant, madam, that your means may not equal your will," he answered, "yet John is reckless — careless —"

Lady Dalrymple's great soft eyes widened. "Wherefore should I spy upon my husband's affairs?" she said coldly. "I am no politician."

"You are a woman," smiled the Viscount. "I think you have some curiosity."

"Believe me — none in these affairs of blood — "

He turned on her with a soft quickness. "How do you know that they are 'affairs of blood'?" he asked.

She stood silent with a frightened face.

"Take care," said the Viscount, rising. "If John is imprudent, he is also violent — the matters that he deals in will bear no meddling of yours."

She shrank away from him.

"Why do you so goad me, my lord?" she said in a trembling defiance. "I came here to avoid my husband, since he declared the sight of me irks him — and then you turn on me — what are you trying to drive me to between you?"

"Merely prudence," answered the Viscount. "A little

prudence and discretion." And he left the room with an indescribable air of cold avoidance.

Lady Dalrymple looked after him with fear and loathing, then sank down into the chair by the fire and gazed listlessly before her, her hands clasped on her knees; her full pink gown, her undressed pale hair under the white lace knotted at her chin, the muslin fichu across her bosom and the glittering gold and purple flowers on her white satin overskirt, made her a figure of brilliant fairness in the somber gorgeous room.

The diamonds in her ears winked in the firelight and the paste buckles of her red silk shoes shone beneath her skirt; round her neck hung a broad mauve ribbon, the end of which was tucked into the gold lace of her bodice.

She sat so, very still, with the firelight glowing on her soft face, till she was disturbed by the great doors being opened; she turned in her seat with a little shrinking movement.

The servant was ushering in a lady, who hesitated on the threshold and said something in a low voice to the man who answered with a bow and a stately request for her to be seated.

Upon that the lady entered, and the servant left, closing the door.

Lady Dalrymple looked at the unexpected visitor timidly and rose with an instinctive courtliness. The lady had paused in the center of the room; the snow lay over her dark habit and in the full curls of her hair.

"I pray you do not let me trouble you," she said in a manner, unnaturally quiet and composed. "My business, madam, is with Sir John Dalrymple — I have been asked to await him here."

"Will you not sit down," said Lady Dalrymple gently. "I do not know your name, but you are very welcome."

She moved her seat from the fire and in a winning way indicated a chair opposite; but the coldness of the other's face and voice did not relax.

"My name is Delia Featherstonehaugh," she said. "And I am neither cold nor tired — only impatient, madam, to get my errand done."

Lady Dalrymple shrank under the rebuff; her soft eyes took in the stranger; she noted the set face, the proud, contained mouth, the defiantly upheld head, the girl's whole carriage as if disdaining everything about her.

"Are you in trouble?" she asked timidly.

Delia's brown eyes swept over her.

"No," she answered coldly, then with sudden force. "Yes — in terrible trouble — but in want, madam, of neither pity nor comfort."

"Alas!" said Lady Dalrymple. "I would not so repulse either were they offered me — and do not you be hard to me — for I would help you an' I could."

"Madam, you cannot — in myself alone lies help — and you — do you lack pity or sympathy?" The tone was coldly contemptuous, but Lady Dalrymple answered gently.

"I did not say so, madam — I say I would not refuse them."

"Madam — " said Delia. "Who are you?"

"I am Lady Dalrymple," was the quiet answer, "and at your service."

Delia drew herself together and held her head still higher.

"I want not your help," she said coldly. "Why was I brought here — I did not come to see you."

"My husband," said Lady Dalrymple gently, "is full of affairs — you must pardon him if he keeps you waiting."

Delia caught at the chair by which she stood.

"Your husband," she repeated under her breath; and at sight of her wild white face the other advanced a step.

"Madam — did you speak?"

Delia clenched her hands and turned her head with a quick look of loathing.

"I said naught," she answered.

Lady Dalrymple considered her; she was interested, sure that beneath her proud containment this girl was in deep distress, and she pitied her.

"Come you on matters of politics?" she asked.

Standing very erect and cold, Delia answered:

"Yes."

"For Scottish affairs?" said Lady Dalrymple.

"Yes," said Delia with wild eyes. "Yes."

Lady Dalrymple again studied her a moment.

"Alas! A matter of life — or death?" she said.

"Yes," answered Delia hoarsely.

"Poor soul!" cried Lady Dalrymple. "Indeed, you must tell it me — "

At the sympathy in her voice and face Delia turned in an agony that almost broke beyond control.

"You must not ask me," she panted. "I pray you that you do not question me."

"But I might serve you," said Lady Dalrymple. The fair face framed in the lace scarce was grieved, tender, a little wondering.

"Doubtless," answered Delia, forcing back her unnatural

calm, "Sir John's wife would have great influence with her lord — yet will I even do without her favor."

And she smiled very bitterly.

A fine flush crept over Lady Dalrymple's face: "You are hard," she said.

"Maybe," replied Delia. "I am different of late — perhaps I am hard, I do not know."

She caught the other woman's eyes on her and flushed, then broke desperately and swiftly into speech.

"I have come to discover if the Macdonalds of Glencoe have taken the oaths to the government."

"Ah," said Lady Dalrymple. "You have friends among them? These Macdonalds — who are they?"

Delia bent her head.

"I wish to know if they are safe or no from the vengeance of — the government."

Lady Dalrymple sank into her chair again, a flutter of ribbons and lace, her blue eyes held a curious look. "If they have testified allegiance, they are beyond the law," she said. "So I have heard; I know little of it."

" 'Tis, madam, what I which to discover: the Secretary for Scotland must know."

Lady Dalrymple lifted her lovely hand and dropped it again.

"He knows," she said.

"Well," cried Delia, "I want to save those people. If they, despite all warnings, have remained obdurate, there will be a horried vengeance taken, you know, belike?"

"I know," said Lady Dalrymple.

"But if they have taken the oaths — and it is blown abroad enough — no one, for shame, could touch them."

"Do you think Sir John will answer you?"

"I will essay it," answered Delia.

A little silence fell; an unusual look of resolution came into Lady Dalrymple's gentle face as she gazed into the fire; Delia, standing with her hands clasped on the chair-back gazed upon her fairness with sick aversion that mounted to her brain and set her mouth into lines of cruelty. At last, with a shiver of satin, Lady Dalrymple moved and looked at the other.

"The Macdonalds *have* taken the oaths," she said quietly, "but it will be suppressed. That is Viscount Stair's work — and the Earl of Breadalbane's."

"I thought so!" cried Delia fiercely. "The Viscount's work, you say! I think Sir John has had a hand in it."

"I will not discuss my husband's politics," interrupted Lady Dalrymple. "I tell you this because I would prevent an injustice and a crime. It is true, and the Macdonalds are doomed, if you can save them — do so — "

"If I can save them!" flashed Delia, "I tell you this shall be over all England to-morrow!"

Lady Dalrymple rose and came toward her.

"So you can save your friends," she said gently.

"Will you not thank me a little?"

Delia stared at her.

"Why should I thank you?" she demanded.

"For what Sir John would not have told you," was the answer. "This news should mean much to you."

"I do thank you, madam," said Delia coldly, drawing back.

Lady Dalrymple came nearer, leaned forward over the table.

"Ah, sit down," she said, sweetly and sadly. "I have few to talk to — "

"Wherefore, madam ?" demanded Delia.

"Because — because it is my will, I mean, they are all employed here — "

She put her hands in a troubled manner to her heart and her restless fingers pulled the mauve ribbon; a closed gold miniature case fell lightly onto the table.

Lady Dalrymple took it up in silence and looked at it with the air of some one who holds something very precious, and who, wishful to display it, yet dreads a scornful reception. She fingered the case a moment in silence and took a timid glance at Delia, who gazed blankly with a troubled face.

Lady Dalrymple encouraged by her look, snapped open the case and held it out hesitating, pleading, making a great effort to be calm.

"My children," she said.

Delia gave one glance, then motioned it away with a gesture of horror.

"How like," she said fearfully.

"How like whom ?" asked Lady Dalrymple startled. "They are beautiful faces — are they not ? Why do you turn away ? I crave people to gaze on them — "

"They are like — Sir John," faltered Delia with quivering lips. "It startled me — "

"Why — you have seen him ?"

"Yes."

Lady Dalrymple frowned. "I do not think they are so like," she said, and shutting the case, put it back into her bosom.

Delia uttered a hard laugh.

"'Tis the same face," she said cruelly.

The other laughed at her.

"We are well hated," she said in a changed tone. "I think he has a name well loathed — but remember, whatever he had planned against the Macdonalds, statecraft well requires it — and I have given you the power to save them."

Delia made no answer; Lady Dalrymple stood by the table, making no further attempt to speak; the silence was broken by the quiet entry of a servant.

"Sir John will see you now, madam," he said, and to Lady Dalrymple he gave a letter.

"Sent by Mr. Wharton's lackey, my lady."

She took it absently; her eyes turned wistfully to Delia, but she, with the slightest cold inclination of her head, left the room without a word.

Lady Dalrymple, chilled and repulsed, even more lonely than before this stranger's coming, sat down again by the fire and the tears welled up into her large eyes.

Yet she was glad that she had spoken about the Macdonalds; something she knew and something she guessed of the plans being laid for their destruction, and it had troubled her; now this girl could see to it that they were saved.

But she might have to pay the price; she remembered the Viscount's last words, "John is reckless and violent," still she was glad of what she had done.

Her glance fell to Mr. Wharton's letter; she broke the seal and opened it; spread it out in the fading light of the winter afternoon and read:

January 10, 1692.

My Lady,

I have been away, or I had sooner answered your letter, which giveth me surprise as well as pain. You ask me to no longer attend you at your house, as Sir John speaketh of me with increased dislike and cannot bear even the mention of my name. I cannot understand that you should pay any attention to a silly prejudice unworthy of a man of sense. Sir John is at full liberty to tell me himself what he mislikes in my conduct, which never (as you can bear me witness) has been in any way offensive to him or wanting in the respect that I, in common with every Whig, have for his abilities. If any fancied affront irks him, he knows how to obtain satisfaction, and I trust that he will either take this course or meet me with the courtesy that I shall always be ready to offer him and that you will not suffer his whim to interrupt a friendship that I have the vanity to believe is not displeasing to you, and is the greatest of honors to your ladyship's humble servant,

Thomas Wharton.

Lady Dalrymple folded the letter away slowly; she was not clever at reading between the lines, and fine phrasing a little confused her; but she caught the spirit of the writer; she saw that it only needed a word from her for Tom Wharton to challenge her husband on the first excuse that came. It was a curious thought; Tom Wharton had fought no duel in which he had not killed or (through good nature) disarmed his man; his perfect swordsmanship was a charm that kept men civil to him through all the offenses of his lax and lazy life, since a duel with him was death or the disgrace of mercy given; she knew her husband's temper too well to think he would accept the last.

She sat thinking quietly; she liked Tom Wharton; he was good-natured, pleasant-mannered, open-hearted, open-handed, he treated her with a flattering deference; though they

had never exchanged confidences, she felt he understood a little of her position; Harry had liked him.

She read his letter through again; her heart swelled at the thought that she was forbidden the only pleasant company of which she knew; she struggled for a moment with rebellion and wild thoughts of swords behind Montague House, of freedom and release — then she sat down to the Viscount's desk and wrote to Tom Wharton a gentle letter in which she desired to be left to obey Sir John's wishes, however unreasonable they might seem.

She sealed it slowly and with a sigh.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PACT

DELIA heard the door closed behind her and lifted her eyes. It was a beautiful room, all carving and gilt with heavy hangings of stamped leather and embroidered satin; the chimney-piece was of massive white marble, carved with fauns and grapes, above it a vast mirror reached to the ceiling; resting against the chimneypiece stood the Master of Stair.

His back was to the door, but Delia could see his face in the mirror; he was looking down, nor did he turn or move at her entrance.

He was quietly dressed, yet there was ostentation about his person, that ostentation from which he was never entirely free; he wore many jewels; he was like his house, of a cold, splendid appearance, a showy somberness, the magnificence of gaiety with no heart behind it; and as his correct manner often had an underlying brutality in it, so his beauty owned a lurking coarseness that only the usual coldness of his demeanor concealed.

But now, as he looked down and she stared at his face in the mirror, she saw the expression of it; a heavy sullenness a fierce impatience barely under control.

He stood perfectly still, as if he did not know that she was there, or was indifferent to her presence, and she remained a foot inside the door, staring at him.

At last he lifted his eyes and the blue of them was painfully vivid in his flushed face; he looked at her image in the mirror and there their glance met.

Then he turned slowly.

"It is strange for you to come here," he said moodily. "I wonder, madam, what you can have to say to me?"

"Do you wonder, Sir John Dalrymple?" answered Delia wth a white hard face. "I come to ask you if you have those papers."

He looked at her curiously.

"Have you those papers?" she repeated, holding herself very still. "We could not tell — there was ash on the floor — that night — of burnt paper — "

For all her terrible effort at calm, her voice failed her; Sir John spoke abruptly:

"I have all the information; all the papers relating to your plot against His Majesty," he said. "I thought you knew."

"I guessed," answered Delia slowly. "And you have not used your information yet?"

"Not yet."

"I have come to ask you to give those papers back to me," she said faintly.

The Master of Stair smiled.

"You are very confident, my fair Jacobite," he said disdainfully. "Those papers were not lightly got — "

She lifted her eyes with more steadiness.

"No," she said, "you paid deep enough for them, did you not, Sir John Dalrymple? You stopped at nothing."

"I do for my cause what you do for yours," he answered coldly. "And this time I win."

"Still I have come to ask you to give me back those papers."

"You are astonishingly simple," said the Master of Stair.

"So you have found me — have you not?" she answered wildly, "a very fool, Sir John Dalrymple, to follow once the very careless lifting of your finger, and fool enough now to think you have some honor — some feeling — some pity for what you have so wantonly destroyed. Those papers stand for the lives — the honor — of thousands, and you stole them."

She put her hand to her side and came a step forward.

"By all the lies you told me," she said, "give back to me what you stole."

"The papers?" he asked quietly.

"My brother —" said Delia, "is not in your power to restore — he is dead —"

"His was a dangerous trade," returned the Master of Stair gloomily. "I spared him the gallows."

Delia stared at him; the words she had been forming seemed forgotten on her lips.

"Why did you kill him?" she asked abruptly.

Sir John suddenly moved from the hearth.

"We talk at strange cross purposes," he said. "Your brother insulted me — I did not murder him," he shrugged his shoulders. "We all take our chances — I ran some risk to gain my end — and did more mischief than I need, maybe," he looked at her curiously. "I've earned your curse — have I not?"

He made a little reckless movement with his hand as if he accepted it and flung it off.

"I have no curse for you, nor reproaches," answered Delia in an intense voice. "I have not come to call you what I might. What is done is done — and I have lived through it. I

have come to ask your mercy — because of what once you said —"

She stopped, he looked at her, saying nothing, with a great effort she went on:

"Undo a little of what you have done — give me back those papers —"

"It is impossible," he said. "Impossible, you may say what you will of me —"

"I have nothing to say," she answered unsteadily. "I have dangerous stuff in me — I know it now. I shall not use a woman's means if you push me too far — I have it in me to pull your fortunes about your feet if you should prove too merciless —"

He smiled imperiously.

"I think you, too, did some lying," he said. "You used strong words to one you talk now of ruining — and half I thought you did not mean —"

But Delia interrupted him. "You lie now," she said in a stifled voice. "You *know* I meant it, meant it so that it touched you even through your falsity."

"Believe I was not insincere — only reckless of the future," he answered in a lower voice. "I did not play with you —"

"I need no explanations," she cried passionately. "Have I not said that I have lived through it? Can I not also be reckless and thank you for the pleasant passing of an hour — can I not, too, forget?"

"I have not forgotten," said the Master of Stair. "Should I have seen you now if I had? I make no excuses. What I have done I have done, but I have not forgotten."

"No," answered Delia. "I do not think you can, and so I come to you to ask your mercy." She moved a step toward

him, her head held back, her face composed and very pale in the shadow of her hat.

"Ye are changed," he said somberly.

"I think I died and have arisen again," said Delia. "I am so changed I do not know myself; if I had been not changed should I be here now? Will you give me those papers?"

"No," he said. "No. Though I would do something for you, Delia, still not that."

"Do you dare to use my name?" she cried.

"Did I not dare more than that?" he answered with a little smile. "Did I not dare to risk your lifetime hate to win you for that one hour — and you were won — though you curse me threefold."

"Why did you do it?" she asked.

"I do not know." He gazed upon her moodily. "It is the Dalrymple way to curse all they touch; yet I did not lie to you. What I said I meant — though now the moment is past."

He broke off staring at her. "Why did you come here?" he said after a moment.

"Have I not told you? To obtain those papers — have you read them?"

"No," he spoke abstractedly, his gaze as if his mind was upon her and not on what she said: "I have not broken the seals; they are for the King."

"You cannot do it," she cried. "Have you not conquered us? You know that your spies watch and track us day and night; you know that we are now powerless — disarmed — is it needful to have blood? Must you know these names?"

"I guess them now," he said. "I know the smooth-faced

lords who eat our bread and betray us, and by Heaven, this time I will have them exposed!"

"Not lords alone," she answered, breathing hard, "but many folk throughout the kingdom have signed that paper — all my friends — they are helpless now — helpless. If you put that paper before the Prince you will bring to the block and the gallows thousands, yea, there are more in this than ye wot of — 'twill be the bloody Assizes again. Your Prince cannot and will not overlook it; but 'tis in your power to be merciful to burn those papers unread and never know the names."

She stopped as though she had put her whole energy into her words and it had suddenly gone out like a sinking flame; she put her fingers to her lips and stared at him over them.

"It is a great chance for you," she said very faintly.

"A chance —?" repeated the Master of Stair.

"Of atonement," said Delia, and her wild brown eyes flashed such a glance of proud misery that he almost winced.

He was fingering with a lazy hand the wreaths that crowned the faun on the marble beside him; he dropped his glance and again there came over his face that curious expression of contained sullenness and defiance.

Delia waited in the center of the room; she could not look at him; her gaze traveled to the long windows and the cheerless prospect of bare trees without.

"Sir John Dalrymple," she said at last. "Will you do the merciful thing?"

He lifted his head; his face was flushed, his eyebrows drawn together.

"I will not be a perfect fool," he said haughtily. "All they who were in this plot shall pay for it as certainly —"

"As you shall pay for what you do, Sir John," she interrupted. "As their crimes of loyalty and courage in a losing cause shall be punished — so shall lying treachery and false-heartedness and hard cruelty be repaid —" she laughed suddenly. "You in the judgment seat — you!" she cried, with her hand to her side.

"Yes — I," he said imperiously. "When your Jacobites can mount it let them judge me — meanwhile — I think he who can hold the sword wields the sword — as I shall do."

She turned from him.

"I have no more to say," she said.

"Nor I," he answered.

With her hand still at her side she crossed to the door; there she stopped and turned to face him.

"I was wrong," she said steadily. "I have something more to say — there are those whom I can save without asking your mercy, the mercy that you have not, Sir John."

He looked at her over his shoulder.

"By to-night," continued Delia, "all London will know that you plan to massacre the Macdonalds of Glencoe."

The Master of Stair swung round.

"It shall also be known," said Delia, with a terrible composure, "that the Macdonalds took the oath and that you and your allies suppress the knowledge that you may not be cheated of your bloody scheme."

The Master of Stair flushed darkly and put his hands to his black velvet cravat as if he would have torn it in rage.

"Who told you that?" he exclaimed fiercely.

"Does it matter?" she answered. "I know, and all England shall know. And you will not dare to touch them — not even you."

"Who told you," he repeated thickly. "What spies have I about my affairs? Who told you?"

Delia laid her hand on the door.

"You can arrest us all," she said quietly. "You can go to the furthest limits of your law, use your foully-won triumph, but you cannot prevent this truth from circling London."

"Is this charity toward those savages or — revenge?" he demanded hotly. "Pity for them or hate of me?"

"Call it what you will," she answered quietly. "Nothing can stop me. Nay, you can arrest me now, but you cannot close my mouth, nor can you put me in any prison so close that this truth shall not escape — to the very footstool of your Prince, who for shame must hear me —"

"Now, if I knew who told you —" said the Master of Stair, "who played this trick on me." He clenched his hand tightly against the marble grapes.

Delia opened the door; it seemed as if she was to go without another word.

"Stop," cried the Master of Stair.

She paused, holding the door ajar, and looked back.

"Who is the dearer to you," asked Sir John, "your Jacobite friends or these Macdonalds?"

She stared in a slow horror.

"I give you your choice," pursued the Master of Stair. "The Macdonalds did not take the oath before the appointed time — yet they took it. If you and your friends will keep this knowledge secret — if you will neither warn the Highlanders nor rouse the Jacobites — then I will burn those papers I hold."

The door slipped from Delia's fingers; she moved back and lifted a colorless face. "What is the punishment you have for

the Macdonalds?" she asked faintly, "what are you going to do with them?"

"Extirpate them," he answered, "the whole race of them. Now choose — your friends or them."

Delia put her hand to her forehead in a listless weary manner as if the life had died within her.

"So — you bargain, Sir John," she said. "And I — I have no choice between a duty and a sentiment — give me my friends."

"It is a high price," he answered with a sudden smile. "Those papers against your silence."

"Burn them — burn them," cried Delia. "Let me see them burnt."

He laughed.

"Why, I shall keep them," he answered, "and if you speak I shall send them to His Majesty — but while you are silent you are safe — you have my word for that."

"Your word!" she echoed, "your word!"

"It is as good as that of other men," he said, "at least you must take it — or if not — well — speak and the papers go to the King."

He turned on his heel abruptly as if suddenly weary of the situation and crossed the room to an inner door which he swept through without a backward look, and closed heavily behind him.

Delia came slowly from her place to where he had stood; slowly she drew her right glove off and with her bare hand timidly touched the marble chimneypiece; then her fingers fell to the spot where his had rested and she caressed the wreathed faun lightly. Her face was flushed and enthralled; fierce suppressed sobs rose in her throat; she stooped at last and set her lips to the cold marble, rested her cheek against it an instant, then drew herself erect, scarlet with shame.

She picked up her glove, her muff, and went from the room, slowly down the gloomy magnificent stairs and out into the cold waning afternoon. The Master of Stair, waiting her coming, watched her from an upper window.

It was beginning to snow and he noticed how she struggled in the teeth of the driving wind as she passed round the square; she was the only soul abroad on foot.

As he looked at her, one of his violent impulses seized him to tear to pieces those papers she asked for and scatter them after her; had he had them there upon him he would have turned and cast them into the fire; scheming and intrigue were hateful to him; he wanted the straightforward action; to crush the Jacobites high-handedly, not hold a terror over a woman's head.

And the generous action would not in this instance be very costly; as she had said he had his spies on all the ringleaders. Berwick was powerless without his French army and Louis would never send an army till he obtained those letters that would never reach him; the men who had signed those documents would be too frightened by their loss to sign others, certainly he could afford to forego a mere vengeance. He proceeded to act at once on his impulse; he went to the Viscount who had the papers, and demanded them.

His father looked up and laughed.

"You want to destroy them," he said dryly. "I have been expecting it — why were you keeping them so long? You are not as adamant as you suppose, John — some one has moved you."

"Give me the papers, my lord," answered Sir John sullenly.

The Viscount shrugged his shoulders. "It is impossible."

"Why, my lord?"

His father twisted his wry neck and gave a little smile.

"I sent them to His Majesty this morning."

CHAPTER XX

ON THE VERGE OF MADNESS

"YOU have sent it to the King — the packet?" ejaculated the Master of Stair.

"I have. It was time," answered the Viscount.

"My lord — why was I not consulted?" flashed his son.

Viscount Stair looked up sideways with a sudden complete drop of his indifferent manner.

"You fool," he said, "you are not in a position you can play with — you have three countries full of enemies and not one friend that I know of — except the King, and what could he do for you if all Scotland started to pull you down? Ye have discovered this plot (more by good fortune than by your own wits), and you would fling away the credit of it for — what? Some rag of sentiment."

"I have not said so," retorted Sir John sullenly.

"Bah!" The Viscount made a grimace. "Why did you delay so long in sending them to Kensington? Believe me, you cannot afford to lose these chances of serving the country: if your enemies find one handle against you — you fall far more quickly than you climbed, my dear son."

"My lord, my lord!" cried the Master of Stair, "the tenure of my office is not so slight."

"You think not?" smiled his father. "I do not now know you could have justified yourself if you had kept those papers

back and it had been discovered. It would have looked like complicity with the Jacobites."

Sir John lifted his head impatiently.

"Am I not the only man about the Court whose hands are clean from that charge?" he cried. "Complicity with the Jacobites! I know no man could dare accuse me."

"And I know a hundred," returned his father. "Arrogance is strangely blind — it stands on a hill and heeds not how the foundations are being sapped till it falls on its face in the mire. And nothing is more pitiable than fallen arrogance."

"Sir — you speak as if I was a boy to be taught by your parables," cried Sir John wrathfully. "I say that by this act of yours you have made me dishonor my word —" Then his angry thoughts flashed to what Delia knew and he turned to his father. "It may ruin my plans with the Macdonalds."

"Better lose the Macdonalds than the Jacobites," answered the Viscount calmly. "And who knows of your Highland schemes?"

Maddened and fuming, Sir John's fury fixed itself on the unknown person who had betrayed him; had Delia known nothing of his scheme he would not have had to degrade himself by a bargain he was powerless to carry out.

"Yea, who knows?" he demanded. "I only knew myself this morning that the Macdonalds had taken the oath, and already I am betrayed — now, in the name of God, who is it?"

The Viscount was cool and sneering again.

"You are absolutely incoherent," he remarked. "But if any one has betrayed your schemes it is, of course, your dutiful wife."

The Master looked round sharply.

"I do not think," he said bitterly, "that she has either the wit or the spirit; and she does not know."

"It is you who do not know," smiled the Viscount. "She spies on you, listens at doors."

Sir John flared into violence.

"She would not dare — I cannot believe, and if I did —"

"Ask her," interrupted his father. "She has a silly habit of speaking the truth — the result I believe of her bad education. She is a marvelously ignorant woman."

"I can note her ill qualities plainly enough, my lord," cried Sir John, goaded now into open fury. "Where is she?"

The Viscount picked up a pen and began cutting it; he eyed the inflamed countenance of his son with a cold amusement.

"I observed her in here a little while ago," he answered quietly. "She was engaged in sealing a letter — to Mr. Wharton."

"Tom Wharton!" cried Sir John.

"Maybe she did not mention to you she had received a message from him — why should she? She knows you have not the friendship for Tom Wharton that she has —"

"My lord," said the Master of Stair, "forebear." He was trembling in an agony of rage. He turned away.

"Where are you going?" inquired his father.

"To find her," said Sir John.

"You will, I think — in the drawing-room," remarked the Viscount smiling.

Without another word Sir John left the room. It was almost dark and the house held the dreariness of winter twilight; as the Master of Stair entered the drawing-room he was greeted with the faint soft light of candles,

burning high up in their silver sconces against the white walls.

It was a vast room furnished in pale tints, cold, with a look of desertion, opal-colored curtains shut out the evening, and the slender furniture cast faint reflections on the polished floor.

On a little gold and cream-tinted couch by the fire sat Lady Dalrymple; in the dim light, with her delicate hued dress and her pale coloring, she looked like some dainty figure of wax, some doll set there to complete the picture, so quiet she was in her desolate splendor.

On a small table beside her stood a bird-cage; she was bending toward it and in the hollow of her hand lay a little bullfinch; her full blue eyes gazed at it anxiously; it was sick and lay quite passively in her hand, its feathers forlornly rough.

"Ah, don't you die, too," she whispered in a kind of horror. "Don't you die, too."

Then she heard the door close and looking round across the pale room, saw her husband.

Instantly she put the bird back in its cage, shut the door on it, and rose.

"Ulrica," said the Master of Stair, "I have something to ask of you."

He came across the room, and at sight of his face the color left her own; she slipped back onto the gold sofa and clasped her hands tightly.

"What do you know of my affairs?" demanded Sir John. "I tell you nothing, but do you spy on me?"

He clenched his hand over the gilding behind her, and she shrank together.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "Why do you speak so to me?"

"Because I desire an answer," he said breathing hard.

"I will give you none," she replied in a trembling indignation. "This is my lord's work — he has set you on me."

"You had better tell me before I discover for myself," said her husband, his voice unsteady with suppressed passion. "Did you see that girl who came asking for me this afternoon?"

She looked away, turning white, but there was that in her could disdain the lie fear prompted.

"Yes," she answered.

"By Heaven!" cried Sir John softly; he came a little nearer. "Did you inform her of anything?"

Her eyes met his with a full look of aversion.

"What is the object of this?" she asked. "Why do you take this manner to me?"

His eye caught a letter lying by the bird-cage, and the sight of it reminded him of the Viscount's second accusation.

"To whom do you write?" he demanded.

She caught the letter up and rose.

"To Mr. Wharton," she answered.

"Give it to me," flashed Sir John with a step forward.

Lady Dalrymple drew back, the letter held to her bosom.

"I give up my friends at your desire," she said. "This is an insult."

Their eyes exchanged hatred, furious on his side, fear mingled with hers.

"Give it to me," he repeated hoarsely.

"No," she answered, "you have no right."

"No right!" He half-laughed. "Do you defy me?"

Her spirit rose at his tone.

"You go too far, Sir John," she shuddered. "Stand further away from me," and at the same instant she flung the letter into the fire, her eyes flashing with anger.

"You may think what you will of the contents," she said. "And I did — "

"You did what, madam?"

Her glance winced under his, but she answered disdainfully:

"I told the girl that these people — whoever they are — these Macdonalds — had taken the oath."

The Master of Stair's face was distorted with a savagery unpleasant to look upon; he stood motionless with his hand on his hip, gazing at her.

"I would do it again," she said. "Why should I be loyal to your blood-stained schemes?"

Her husband threw up his hand as if to shut out the sight of her.

"Keep away from me," he cried. "For I know not what I may do."

"Ah, you can do no more to me than you have done," she answered. "You have — "

He suddenly caught her by the arm, checking what she would have said.

"If you spy on me," he said breathing fast, "if you blow my affairs abroad — oh, by God, madam, you will try me beyond endurance."

She went white and shivered, straining away.

"Let go of me," she whispered in a terrified voice.

But his grip tightened, and as she looked up into his mad eyes, a horror seized her.

"You want another murder on your name!" she cried.

He loosened his hold and staggered back against the wall.

"Oh, dear Heaven!" he said under his breath. "Dear Heaven — "

He put his hand to his forehead, staring at her in a wild manner.

"Ye are mad!" whispered Lady Dalrymple in awestruck tones.

"Maybe," he answered hoarsely. "Maybe — keep away from me — take care."

He strode away across the room and she heard the door bang heavily behind him. She stood still a moment, then, trembling, crossed to the desk. She thought of the contents of Tom Wharton's letter, and smiled in mockery at herself. There was one could do what she could not for herself; she would write another letter in another spirit.

Scandal! What did she care for scandal now!

In a rare mood of recklessness she seated herself at the white and silver bureau and drew out a sheet of paper. But ere her hand could trace any of her confused thoughts the sound of the opening door alarmed her.

In the doorway stood the Countess Peggy, surveying her with sharp green eyes under the shade of her feathered hat.

"Weel," she said with her usual self-possession, "I will have been saying for some time now that I would come and see ye, and to-day I came. But your servant will not be knowing where ye are, and so they put me in a vast room ower dark, and I grew weary of waiting, so started to find ye."

Lady Dalrymple could do nothing but look at her in a dazed manner and falter something below her breath. The Countess crossed over to her, looking vivid, brilliant and

splendid in the pale room; the winter air had touched her cheeks with an apple-blossom red; her lithe figure carried regally her green velvet gown and her trailing furs.

She sank onto the little settee and looked across at the white silent woman at the bureau.

"Why, ye are ill!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, no!" said Lady Dalrymple faintly. "You must, madam, excuse me — you startled me."

But the sharp eyes of the Countess Peggy were not to be deceived. "What has happened?" she demanded.

Lady Dalrymple writhed under this intrusion. She fixed her eyes on the blank sheet of paper as if to encourage herself in an ebbing resolution.

"Madam — I assure you," she began.

Lady Breadalbane rose and came up behind her.

"Ulrica Dalrymple, ye no' tell the truth when ye say ye ar'na' ill — "

The other rose desperately.

"It is naught," she said, and drew her fichu closer round her shoulders. "I — I — "

"I will be calling your woman or Sir John."

"Oh, no," was the vehement answer, "I beseech you, madam, that you will not."

So wild and white she looked, so desperately she trembled and clasped her shaking hands on her bosom, that the other woman stood arrested, staring at her. The Countess shared the common knowledge of Sir John's domestic affairs, and as she looked at his wife her thoughts leaped to a swift conclusion.

"Ulrica — has he been laying hands on ye?" she asked. "Sir John, I mean."

"No, no," answered Lady Dalrymple desperately. "My God, no, how dare you ask me?"

Lady Breadalbane looked at her unmoved.

"Finish your letter," she said calmly. "I would no' be disturbing ye."

But the anger of Sir John's wife had flamed up only to die out and leave the ashes of utter misery behind.

"I will not write it," she replied. "God forgive that I ever thought I would."

She sank down on the other end of the settee, too overwrought to conceal her distress, and Lady Breadalbane's clear eyes measured her curiously.

There was a silence of seconds, then the Countess spoke.

"Ye are very unhappy, Ulrica Dalrymple — ye seem to have made a fine confusion of your life — and I would tell ye that ye will no' be bettering it by puling and whimpering."

Lady Dalrymple turned wild eyes to her.

"What do you know of any of it?" she asked.

"Weel, I ken somewhat," was the composed answer. "And I'm sorry for ye — but I dinna think that ye will improve your lord's temper with a gloomy face and a moping manner"

"What do you mean?" asked Lady Dalrymple faintly.

The Countess turned to her sharply.

"Woman, woman," she cried. "Dinna ye ken that a man likes a cheerfu' face aboot him, and a house that is warm and well-lighted, not a great auld barn like this, which would disconcert ony but ghosts?"

A faint flush crept into Lady Dalrymple's face.

"And am I to give all the service? I am to supply all the gaiety, the life, the care against his mere tolerance?"

"Yes," was the calm answer. "It comes to about that if ye want a life that is worth living — ye must give somewhat your side; remember he has more on his mind than ye will ever ken."

As she spoke the Countess lifted her eyes to a portrait over the bureau, it was of Sir John and taken in his May of life; he wore a cuirass and plumed hat and smiled out of the canvas, as handsome a face as a man may have.

His wife followed the Countess's glance.

"He is not like that now," she said bitterly. She rose. "Did you ever hate any one, madam?" she asked. Then, without waiting, she answered herself. "It is terrible to hate," she said hoarsely. "And terrible to be hated."

She turned wildly about and caught up the cage of bullfinches. She held them close to her bosom.

"They eat from my hand," she said wistfully. "I think they like me."

Then she burst into hysterical laughter and hurried from the room, swiftly, through the folding-doors.

The Countess Peggy looked again at the portrait over the bureau, and slowly rose and crossed over to it. She studied it for some time in silence, holding the candle that stood underneath up above her head that she might see the better. She heard the door open and turned to see the original of the portrait within a few feet of her.

He paused, arrested by seeing her.

"I did not know that you were here," he said quickly.

The Countess Peggy set the candle down, a little discomposed by his sudden appearance.

"I came to see your lady, Sir John."

It seemed that his pallor deepened.

"She was here — you saw her?"

"Yes, Sir John."

His blue eyes swept over her; she winced under it, a rare thing for her; she could not look at his proud, gloomy face; her own flushed a little; she shifted onto common ground.

"Ye hae heard, Sir John, that the Jacobite, Jerome Caryl, is to be examined privately at Kensington to-morrow?"

He put his hand to his black velvet cravat as if to loosen it.

"Yes, I have heard."

She rose, still not looking at him, and crossed to the door.

"Good-even, Sir John."

Under the influence of his splendid presence her voice was almost timid.

"Good-even, madam."

He opened the door for her in an indifferent manner, and when she had gone he crossed to the bureau and snatched up the candle she had held, and gazed at his portrait as she had gazed, with a strange curiosity.

CHAPTER XXI

WILLIAM OF ORANGE

JEROME CARYL was informed that he was to be examined. It was the day after his arrest, he had been followed to his lodging, taken quietly and conveyed to the guard-house at Kensington. No chance was his to pass on warning to any save Berwick, and it was doubtful whether he now would be able to leave the country. The government was on the alert.

Jerome Caryl had no thought for company save of failure; he had played for a high stake and the price for losing it was heavy. Personally he looked ahead with calm eyes; the prospect for him was utterly hopeless: Tyburn as soon as they could hurry his trial through; his guilt was obvious, beyond dispute. And when those papers were opened at Kensington the thousands who had been prompted by his persuasions and their own rashness to sign them would be sent in his footsteps to glut the government revenge.

At this reflection Jerome Caryl did flinch, at the bloodshed there would be; the sneer of the French at his clumsiness, and King James's bewail that he was so badly served. He knew that his wholesale failure could not be judged lightly at St. Germains, even though he hanged for it.

He had been fooled; that unforgivable thing that carried the scorn of his enemies and the curses of his friends: he had fallen headlong to his own destruction and dragged after

him those who had trusted him; a bitter reflection for his solitude.

Of his dead friend's sister, Caryl could not trust himself to think. He could not know if she had heard of his arrest, but he did know that whether warned in time or not, she would stay and share the common fate.

Some might try and fly to France, but not Delia Featherstonehaugh.

But these thoughts he thrust from him as he was conducted from his solitude along the quiet rooms of the palace. His face grew disdainful as he reflected the examination he must be put to was a mere flourish. They knew everything. Did they want him to betray secrets in their possession already? The government held in its hand the plot and all concerned in it. Jerome Caryl felt contemptuous of this slow dealing. Why did they not strike and have done? The power was theirs.

Added to this, the soldier conducting him, a Dutchman, who seemed to have no English, roused Jerome's ire curiously; the prisoner noticed how the fellow's uniform sat in creases on his fat figure, how he wheezed and moaned to himself as he mounted the stairs, and how he eyed his charge from time to time with a glance of heavy aversion. At every doorway a sentinel was posted, and with him the fat Dutchman exchanged slow speech in his own language, while Jerome waited his pleasure, swordless, helpless, in a cold wrath at these lumpish foreign intruders.

"Have you, sir, no English here?" he demanded at last. "Or is Kensington entirely filled with your countrymen?"

The Dutchman looked at him insolently and made no answer; it was doubtful if he understood.

They had reached now a small ante-chamber at the end

of a long gallery; it was very ill-lit; the soldier's blue uniform showed dimly through the gloom; a high-nosed, pale-faced young man was engaged in tying up papers at a side table. He came forward and spoke in a suppressed manner to the soldier, who, Jerome gathered from the address, was Count Solmes of the famous "Blues."

The Englishman looked on in disinterested curiosity; the whole surroundings were as unpretentious as might be the back parlor of a small merchant's shop: the officials all seemed affected with the same taciturn manner and somber clothing. Dutch appeared the only language spoken.

His gossip over, Count Solmes disappeared through an inner door, and the pale usher turned gloomy eyes on Jerome, who, thinking of the court of the Second Charles, inwardly smiled and sighed alike.

The Count, returning, was accompanied by another Dutch gentleman who, remaining on the threshold, beckoned Jerome into the inner room.

This was more cheerful of aspect, being lit by two long windows that looked on the garden, and so small that the firelight filled it from end to end.

The two Dutchmen talked together with no heed of the fourth occupant of the room, a lean man in the prim gown and wig of a Scottish clergyman, who sat by the window, evidently waiting.

Jerome Caryl knew him at once for Carstairs, chaplain to their Majesties for Scotland, and confidential adviser to the King. "A drab-hued court," he smiled to himself, and while Count Solmes talked to his friend and the Rev. William Carstairs gazed out of the window at the bare trees, the Jacobite prisoner idly noted what manner of room he was in.

Floor, walls and ceiling were paneled in highly polished wood; a bureau stood between the two windows, and before it a chair; a second chair and a stool similar to that on which Carstairs sat, completed the furniture, all of the same stiff pattern and absolutely plain.

On the wooden chimneypiece stood two heavy brass candlesticks, polished till they shone like gold; above hung a dark portrait in a gilt frame of a fashionably dressed lady, who smiled aimlessly; she was flanked by two smaller pictures of vases of fruit, stiff but rich in coloring.

Close behind Jerome, on a shelf that appeared to have been affixed on purpose, stood a curious tall vase of blue and white Delft; from each of the ten spouts breaking the side, showed the tips of a tulip bulb with the first points of green; in the opening of the vase itself lay another larger and ready to burst into flower.

The Dutchmen broke off their converse at last and left the room. Jerome turned to the silent figure by the window.

"Sir," he said evenly, "can you tell me what is intended toward me: on what I wait?"

Carstairs showed a solemn face.

"Young man," he replied, "albeit I am not here to answer thy questioning, yet out of charity will I inform thee, that thou art shortly to be examined for thy manifold offenses."

Jerome smiled. It was familiar phraseology.

"By whom, sir?"

"By those whom thou hast offended," was the answer. As he spoke Carstairs rose and his spare figure looked unnaturally tall.

"God turn thee, young man, from the heathenish worship of idols that has led thee into these errors," he said gravely.

"Thou art one of the Magliants who distract this land yet, although the Lord has seen fit to remove them from their high places and set up his lowly servants."

He put out his hand in a gesture of proud humility, and Jerome saw that his thumb was a mere shriveled stump of bone.

"Maybe there is but a little time left to thee, therefore repent swiftly lest thou lose the world everlasting as thou hast the world of the flesh."

With this he turned slowly and left the room.

Jerome leaned against the wall and waited, his feeling a curious one of disinterest and indifference; a man hopelessly in the hands of his enemies, a man who has failed and is at the mercy of those whom he hates and has striven to overthrow, has no chance save to stand silent, contemptuous of himself.

After a few moments a gentleman entered, and Jerome looked up.

The new-comer wore his hat and passed at once to the chair by the bureau, where he sat down, and with no heed of Jerome began opening some letters that lay there.

He wore a black velvet riding-suit, heavily gallooned with gold; a diamond fastened the long feather in his gray beaver. There was a quantity of fine lace on his cravat and at his wrists, the gold handle of his sword was of most beautiful workmanship. He glanced over the letters, then pulling off his gloves looked up at Jerome. His eyes, of that hazel that is almost green, were large and very brilliant, his features aristocratic, clear-cut, composed, and shaded by heavy auburn curls.

Jerome Caryl knew him at once, and flushed deeply in the suddenness and unexpectedness of the encounter.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Caryl," said William of Orange with a little nod. "Will you sit down? The stool is 'ard, but you save there a chair more comfortable."

Jerome Caryl bowed.

"I do not look for ease in Kensington, your Highness," he answered, and remained standing.

The King took a packet from the bureau drawer, and placed it beside his hand. At sight of it the color came anew into Jerome Caryl's face. He recognized the familiar leathern case.

"Milor' Stair," said William, "send this me — it is yours — you know it — *n'est pas?*"

"It is mine," replied Jerome coldly. "It was stolen from me by one of your Highness' ministers."

The King looked at him steadily.

"Yes, it is so," he said. "You 'ave been outwit'. Mon Dieu! sometime it is to be expect'! Sir John 'ave not a 'ead for plot — but you — you 'ave behave' — like the fools."

With the same perfect composure and unmoved face, he opened the case and took out the papers. Jerome noticed that the seals were not yet broken.

"We are prepared to pay for being fools, your Highness," he said coldly.

"It is to be hope'," remarked William dryly. "You can all do that — you foreigners — when you 'ave play' the fool you can pay for it."

His eyes flashed for a moment to Jerome Caryl's steady presence, then fell to the letter he held.

"This," he said, "is a letter for my uncle at St. Germains. I believe 'e get many such — *pourquoi non?*"

He took up the next paper, then put it down and laid

his small, high-bred hand over it; the upper part of his face was hidden in the shadow of his hat, but Jerome fancied he detected a faint smile on the thin lips, and it fired his blood.

"Sir," he demanded, "may I ask what you want of me? Where this leads? I deny nothing."

"It would be mos' foolish," interrupted William. "It is prove'. "

"Will your Highness then make an end?"

"That is not the way in this mos' advance' country," answered William, and now there was no mistaking the smile. "My cousin in France 'as the *lettres de cachet* — but 'ere we 'ave the trial, the witness, the lawyer — all mos' fair."

He leaned back on his chair and his smile deepened.

"It is amusin' 'ow you plot for the King you yoursel' throw out. This is a list for my cousin (or Monsieur de Louvois) signe' by all you could persuade — *n'est pas?*"

He sat up with a rattle of his sword-hilt against the chair.

"Who of my courtiers 'ave their names there?" he said, tapping the sealed paper. "It is mos' amusin', but, monsieur, it is not new to me. Per'aps you think I am thick head, and do not know who betray me — Mon Dieu! I think I tell you almos' all the names there."

"Your Highness employs many of the men whose names you will find there," said Jerome, "and there are many more whom your Highness has never heard of, country gentlemen, honest small folk all over England whom you can ruin at once — you can be revenged on your servants and these others, your Highness, by merely opening that paper."

"You, monsieur, speak like a enemy of me," said William calmly. "You think it is my pleasure to shed blood — you are of those who write that when I was outside Bruxelles I burn,

alive my wounded soldiers, and that I poisone' my Uncle Charles — I 'ave read these things in your leaflets."

Jerome flushed.

"I have had no hand in those," he answered. "I find my cause too good an one to need lies to support it. I deny that you are King of England, your Highness, — I am not blind to your qualities."

"Yet, Mr. Caryl, you speak to me of being revenge' — which is a thing for men like Milor' Mordaunt. This is not, Mon Dieu, the firs' plot I 'ave discover' since I was child. I 'ave learn' to take insult and betrayal."

He rose and came into the room, the paper in his hand.

"The nobles, I know," he said. "An' they serve me so they stay — if I send to the Tower all who write to St. Germains — who 'ave I left? And I will spare them my forgiveness."

"And we pay for your clemency, sir," replied Jerome Caryl bitterly. "We humbler plotters."

William turned and looked at him. They were standing very near each other. The King took his hat off and flung it down on the chair beside him.

"Mr. Caryl," he said, "you are *gentilhomme* — cannot you see that I will not do something? I will not 'unt down these bourgeois — what are they? I will not know their name'."

He held the papers out to the Jacobite.

"I am tire' of your plot," he finished. "Put that in the fire and let me 'ear no more of it."

Jerome Caryl stared at him, utterly bewildered and confused; the sense of what this meant rushed over him, making him giddy.

"Put these in the fire," repeated the King. "I 'ave no more time."

The Jacobite took the papers; with a great rush of crimson to his face, he thought of Delia and the hundreds to whom this would mean salvation.

"Your Highness is magnanimous," he said unsteadily. "Your generosity disarms me."

"You 'ave mistake' me," answered William coldly. "Wherefore did you think I would wish to be revenge'? Sir John think to serve me with this an' I am indebt' to 'im that he preserve peace, but I do not stoop, Mr. Caryl, to revenge."

He went back to his seat at the bureau; there was a pause, a silence, then Jerome Caryl put the papers into the fire; the great flare they made lit up the pale face of William of Orange and the beautiful flushed countenance of the Jacobite.

Across the narrow bright room the eyes of the two men met, as if they measured each other; then the King dropped his glance to the letters before him.

"You 'ave nothing more to say?" he asked coldly. "Then you may depar'."

"I shall not soon forget your Highness' generosity," said Jerome Caryl unsteadily, and the sincerity of his voice made amends for the conventional wording.

"Call it my policy," answered William with a slight lift of his green eyes. "And so, Mr. Caryl, you will be spare' an obligation."

Jerome Caryl waited for him to demand some oath or promise, to attach some condition to this cold magnanimity; he felt more utterly at this man's mercy than when those papers lay under his hand.

Suddenly the King looked up.

"For what do you wait?" he demanded. "You are free — go back — to your plot if you will, only I give you this advice — take care 'ow you sign paper' — it is dangerous — *n'est pas?*"

Jerome colored painfully.

"My duty to my King," he said, "must make me appear ungrateful, but without disloyalty to my cause I can assure your Highness that I will follow no unworthy means of serving your enemies."

"Such as Monsieur Grandval use'?" answered William, with a half-smile.

"By Heaven, no," cried Jerome vehemently, "I have never been of that kind."

William slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"My cousin of France is *gentilhomme*," he said, "but 'e and my uncle send Monsieur Grandval to — what would you say? — murder me — *voila tout.*"

Jerome Caryl stood silent; mention of the Grandval affair was painful to any follower of the Stuart cause; the King touched the bell on his desk, and the high-nosed young man entered. William addressed him in his fluent French.

"Show out this gentleman," he said, "and if Sir John be here send him in."

He inclined his head gravely toward Caryl, who bowed slightly, not knowing what to do, for a strange bewilderment that possessed him, and without another word on either side they parted.

The King looked after him with a contained face, then gave a glance of distaste at his pile of unopened letters

and pushed his chair back so that his head rested against the wall; the room was full of pleasant warm shadows that flickered up and down the shining polished walls; the candlesticks and the fireirons winked and glittered and the views from the two windows showed like two pictures in cold grays and blues in great contrast to the warm light within.

The palace clock struck half past-five. William drew out his watch, a sapphire in the back glittered as he moved it; it was correct; he put it back in his pocket.

The door was opened noiselessly by the usher and Sir John Dalrymple entered with the ease of a man familiar and welcomed. William, still with his fingers in his watch chain, spoke without moving.

"I 'ave seen your Jacobite, Sir John."

"I was surprised, sir, to meet him leaving Kensington a free man."

The Master of Stair crossed to the hearth and stood there; his face was set and his manner troubled.

"Your Majesty has received the evidence of this plot from my father?" he said.

"And I 'ave destroye' it, Sir John," answered William. "This man jus' now, 'e burnt it."

"Burnt it!" echoed the Master. "Did your Majesty read it?"

"No," said the King. "For what use? For what end should I wish to know these people? I am tire' of your plot; but they are mos' 'armless — let them go."

Sir John stood silent. So the King had done what Delia Featherstonehaugh had asked him to do; the mercy he had refused had been granted by another; the Jacobites would go unscathed and yet he must bear the odium of having broken his word; in the mind of that girl he would get no

credit for this; she would know from Jerome Caryl that he was not to be thanked, yet he would have gained nothing by his seeming perjury; the lords whose names were on that list would continue to flaunt with their heads high; his labor had gone for nothing.

These thoughts rushed upon him and his blue eyes lit dangerously.

"Sir, your Majesty is too careless," he said. "This was a far-reaching conspiracy that with infinite trouble I fathomed — plot within plot — circle within circle."

"They can do nothing, Sir John, now they are discover'," answered the King calmly. "They will take warning — if not, Mon Dieu! What good are they without France? And France — will she move till she get those papers I burn jus' now?"

"Berwick is in London," cried Sir John.

"I am not afraid of 'im'" replied William.

As he thought of the vast shoal escaping the net he had been at such pains to lay for them, Sir John's rage rose higher.

"There are more in this than you imagine, sir," he said hotly.

"I know mos' of them," answered William with the same unmoved demeanor. "Every one about the Court I think excep' Milor' Somers, and Milor' Nottingham — and per'aps pretty little Shrewsbury or Devonshire — but I say that I am tire' sir, of this subject."

"They plot still," persisted the Master of Stair, "and they plot assassination."

"Is it not al-way' so?"

"Your Majesty," cried Sir John, "I say again you are too careless; for a certainty my Lord Marlborough is in

this, and Marlborough is the army; Russell is in it, and Russell is the navy. I think Breadalbane has meddled, though darkly."

"All this is mos' true, Sir John," returned the King, "but it is al-so true that while I am at St. Jame' and my uncle at St. Germains they will do nothing."

"I have said that they plot assassination, and now that you have destroyed all proof, all evidence, your Majesty's life is not safe. How can you tell who is in this conspiracy; how judge of the loyalty of the men about you? Any one of them may be in Berwick's pay to murder your Majesty!"

William sat up and leaned across the table.

"Sir John," he said, "I am surprise' that a man of your — *esprit* bring me these child tale' — I do not think I shall be murder', but I will take the risk of it — and now we will speak of Scotlan'."

His cold voice was a dismissal of the subject.

The Master of Stair caught his breath in an effort at self-control; he had served the King at infinite labor and some risk; he had gathered all the threads of this conspiracy into his hands at the price of two men's lives, and it had been for nothing. If he could not crush the Jacobites he wanted at least the glory of sparing them; and he had neither the satisfaction of one nor the other; his wrath rose against the King, he did not comprehend his motives. His own impulse was to sweep the country clear of Jacobites by fire and sword or, if it must be mercy, to confront them with proofs of their guilt and then forgive them grandly before all the world.

His passion at this dismal end to his intrigues grew beyond bearing; he looked up with lowering brows.

"I say it to your face, sir," he said thickly, "that you play a foolish — and a dangerous game."

William of Orange rose and came round to the other side of the bureau, where he leaned and looked at the Master of Stair.

"Whatever game I play," he said, "it is not that of being your puppet, Sir John. I 'ave my own motive' — if you cannot understan' them — very will — it make' no difference."

His green eyes narrowed a little as he watched the furious face opposite; he picked up the riding-whip from the table and flicked it gently to and fro across his high boots.

"I think I am the master," he said, and his tone brought the hot blood into Sir John's face.

"You are the King," he answered in a constrained voice. "But I am not one of those who believe, sir, that the King can do no wrong."

"No," said William quietly, "you think the King can be pull' by strings — per'aps if you 'ave a Stuart or a Bourbon — but I — I 'ave rule' before I am King — I do not need your title. I am Nassau. I will not be question' — you understan' ?"

Sir John put his hand to his cravat and dragged at it; he was face to face with a character that he could not understand, and a spirit every whit as masterful as his own. Rage at his own inferior position, the fret of the lost chance of glorification, the bitterness of being overruled, put him into a passion that flushed his face and made his voice shake.

"Sir — if your generosity to your friends equaled the generosity you show your enemies, I should have had at least some thanks for my service — you are as ungrateful, sire, as you —"

Abruptly the King interrupted:

"I'll take no more, Sir John," he cried; he eyes half-shut in a sinister manner and the whip tapped faster on his boot. "You 'ave forgotten you are not in your Parliament 'ouse."

The Master of Stair felt he had gone far enough; he acknowledged himself over-matched, though with no good grace; he turned under the hard gaze of the King and muttered some words of apology, but only as if William's cold glance forced him to them against his will; in his heart he hated the man who overbore him.

Suddenly the King laughed.

"You 'ave not a courteous temperament," he said. "You are too stiff, Sir John, and too fiery."

The Master of Stair bowed and bit his lip.

The King crossed to the chair by the fire and sank into it with an air of weariness.

"About Scotlan'," he said disinterestedly. "These 'ighlander' 'ave all come in?"

He was not looking at the Master, and did not see the glance Sir John gave him. He answered in a voice unnaturally controlled:

"All save the Macdonalds of Glencoe, your Majesty."

"Ah?" said the King indifferently. "Will you, sir, ring the bell for the candle?' "

Sir John obeyed. His face was hard, his lips set into a curious smile. He glanced again at the man by the fire and his eyes wore an unpleasant expression.

There was silence till the entry of the usher, then William turned in his chair.

"You will find there," he said to him, in French, "letters to Heinsius and Waldeck — see that they are sent to-night."

Again a pause. A somber servant entered and lit the candles, drew the curtains; the little room grew golden from end to end. By the table stood the Master of Stair, motionless; he had drawn a paper from his pocket and held it down by his side, his handsome face now its usual pallor and the strange drag about the mouth, a distortion that gave a certain terror to his expression.

William leaned back in his chair, his profile, with the high nose, arched brows and sunken cheek, was clearly revealed in the candle-light; his hands showed startlingly white against his black dress, and a diamond on his first finger glittered with many colors.

The usher took up the papers and left, the door closed softly behind him.

Sir John Dalrymple turned slowly to the King.

"I have a paper here for your Majesty's signature," he said quietly. "Of no importance — merely a letter to the Commander of the Forces in Scotland, relative to the preserving of the peace."

"And is that all the business you 'ave for me?"

"It is, your Majesty," Sir John spoke with lowered lids.

William sat up in his chair.

"Well, 'and it me," he said. "Bring the pen."

Sir John brought a pen and the paper.

"It is nothing of importance?" asked William, looking at the folded sheet.

"Of none whatever, sir."

The King affixed his great scrawling signature.

"Take it to Milor' Nottingham for the countersign, Sir John."

"Sir, Lord Nottingham is not at the palace to-night, and it is desirable that this go immediately."

William took the letter, opened it, laid it on his knee, signed it again at the top, and handed it back to Sir John.

"I thank your Majesty" said the Master of Stair with a little smile.

The King lay back in his chair.

"There is nothing more to-night, I think, Sir John."

"Sire, I take my leave."

"You will come with me to the continent in a few days, *n'est pas?* Good-evenin', Sir John."

The Master of Stair bowed.

"Take care of the tulip, Sir John — the other day Milor' Devonshire 'e knock the tips off."

William looked toward the bulbs with the interest of the born gardener; in the warmth they gave out a faint sickly fragrance, a sense of young green. "They are very well," remarked the King with satisfaction. "If I 'ad keep them in water they would not smell so — is it not charming? Like it come through the window at Saint Loo."

He smiled on Sir John, who bowed without a word and left the room.

As he passed down the long gallery, he met Argyll.

"Ye look miserable, my lord," he cried with a hard laugh. "Read this."

He held out the letter the King had just signed.

"Weel," said the Earl peevishly. "What may this be?"

Sir John lowered his voice.

"The authority — the warrant you asked for, my lord. The King saith he is no man's puppet — but he has served my turn now — he signed and did not read this — look

here — my Lord Argyll." He pointed out a clause in the letter; it ran:

"As for Makian of Glencoe and that tribe, if they can well be distinguished from the other Highlanders, it will be proper for the vindication of public justice to extirpate that set of thieves."

CHAPTER XXII

THE RESOLUTION OF DESPAIR

DELIA FEATHERSTONEHAUGH sat in her miserable little lodgings in Southwark and looked across the gaunt room at Jerome Caryl. He had told her how the cold clemency of the King had thwarted all the schemes of the Master of Stair, how all evidence against them was destroyed.

Delia listened with no look of joy or relief; she gave a bitter laugh.

"So it has all been for nothing — nothing," she said. "Why could not he have been merciful rather than the Prince — why could not *he* have done the fine things?"

"It is not in his nature," answered Jerome Caryl.

"No," shuddered Delia; the thought of how he must have gone straight from the shameful bargain he had made with her to break it, of how he must have laughed at her simplicity; had he had his way he would have had her and all of them at Tyburn; the thought was as blasphemy, but it was true.

"What will you do?" she asked with the listlessness of misery.

Jerome Caryl smiled faintly; he was as a man whose heart has left his work, there seemed no longer any zest for him in what till now had been his life-work.

"I must go and put Berwick's mind at rest," he said,

"and the others — they will be with him, I suppose. As for the plot — "

Delia interrupted him "For me the plot is dead — I care nothing what man reigns. What are Kings and countries when your own heart is touched? Has not all we have done turned to nothing! Did not Perseus die for nothing? My God, I have done with plots."

Jerome Caryl made no answer; he thought of his own tangled cause, of the King he fought for, of the shouting, lying, pushing, intriguing mob that followed him, of the weapons they stooped to, and he thought of William of Orange in his little room at Kensington, ruling half Europe and disdaining even to notice their designs against him and it seemed to him he had been striving to oppose a rock with a straw.

Delia came suddenly across to him.

"I cannot talk to-night," she said hoarsely, "will you come again to-morrow, Jerome?"

He looked at her in a pitying, troubled manner.

"You are wondering what is to become of me?" she asked, meeting his glance. "Well, to-morrow will be soon enough: come again to-morrow."

She sat down and turned her face away as if she dismissed him; Jerome Caryl rose heavily.

"Do you want money?" asked Delia in a weary voice. "There is plenty — you know Perseus had the last sent over by the King. I have it here."

"It is all too little for your own needs," he answered. "Keep it, Delia."

Her head had sunk back against the plaster wall.

"To-morrow, then," she said, and seemed as if she wished

to say no more; but when he had his hand on the latch he was startled by her: she rose, her apathy changed into sudden passion.

"Oh, Jerome! Jerome!" she cried, hurrying to him. "Thank God for such as you. Thank God for truth and honor and faithfulness. Give me your hand and look at me and say — God bless you, Delia!" She swayed toward him with a little sob and caught his arm; he was greatly moved.

"While I live, sweet soul," he answered, "I would not have you fear anything. God bless you truly, dear, God bless you, Delia — "

She bent her head and kissed his hand, then lifted her eyes to his with a strange took. "Farewell, Jerome," she said in a broken voice, and fell back against the wall; the contrast of her pitiful pale youth and the sordid surroundings touched Jerome Caryl deeply.

"You must leave this place," he said.

She stopped him with that word again. "To-morrow."

And so, leaning against the wall, she stood till he had gone, then turned about, murmuring to herself.

"An honorable gentleman — why could not I have loved an honorable gentleman?"

She paced to and fro with unheeding steps.

"False and false — liar and dishonored — yet — " Her tears rose beyond control; she fell to her knees and wept with hidden face, bitterly and silently.

The fire dropped to a heap of gray ashes; the light had faded when at length Delia rose, and moving to the window, set it wider open.

The sun was sinking behind the housetops; heavy snow-laden clouds lay to the right and left of it and the whole west

was golden. A cold wind touched her tear-stained face and ruffled her tumbled hair; the sun's reflection burnt like flame in the window-pane and cast a dazzle along the thin frosting of snow on the ledges opposite.

It was silent as night; she was too high to view the street; but a sign hanging from one of the houses opposite, she caught sight of, the image of a peacock in full splendor and the sun glittered on that in vived blue and green.

Then gradually the sky faded into a soft violet and the great clouds closed over the sun.

Delia left the window and taking her cloak from the wall, put it on with steady hands; then she dragged a small box from the corner into the light and opened it.

From the many little articles it contained, she selected a plain ring that had belonged to Perseus, a leathern purse of money and a gilt button that had once belonged to her father's uniform.

These things she placed carefully within her pocket, then taking pen and paper from the box, she sat down and wrote across it:

Even had there been no other motive to take me away, I could never have stayed to be a burden on your charity. I set out to do the one thing that maketh life worth the holding. Do not regret or pity me and God keep ye always for the comfort ye have been to me.

She folded this and addressed it to Jerome Caryl, her eyes lifted to the fast-darkening sky; her lips were resolutely set. With a steady step she turned from the room and down the narrow stairs.

Calling the woman of the house, she gave her money and the letter for Caryl.

"He will come to-morrow," she said. "Do not fail to remember to give him that."

The woman began to whimper.

"Woe is me for the Good cause!" she cried dismally. "Will there be a to-morrow for any of us?"

"Ye are all safe," answered Delia steadily, "I do not fly for fear — farewell."

She turned abruptly into the quiet street and turned toward the country.

CHAPTER XXIII

JAMES FITZJAMES

AS Jerome Caryl turned up the stairs of the Duke of Berwick's lodging, he was greeted by a hubbub of noise, above which rose the prolonged giggle of a man and the interchange of women's voices.

Jerome opened the door without ceremony and stepped in.

The center of the room was occupied by a long table, surrounded by a varied company, who laughed, talked, and sang with little regard for each other; at the head of the table sprawled a very tall young man in a soiled blue satin suit and torn cravat; his wig hung on the knob of his chair, his fair hair fell untidily over his blond face; his was the good-humored, high-pitched giggle that rose above all other sounds.

The rest of the company was mostly ill-clad and ill-looking, though a certain careless good nature redeemed most of the faces; of the two women present one was a dark-skinned girl with an arched nose and a quantity of heavy black hair, the other a slim and elegant lady, who sat a little apart from the others; her companion, a gentleman, better attired than the others and who showed signs of great agitation, glancing round, wringing his hands and dabbing his face with his handkerchief. At Jerome Caryl's entry he gave a great start and something like a suppressed shriek, an action that brought on him a glance of contempt from the lady.

"La!" cried the tall young man as he caught sight of the

new-comer. "We wasn't expecting you, Caryl — we thought you was on a visit to little Hooknose."

"I am free, sir," answered Caryl, advancing into the company, "I thought your grace had left England," he added briefly.

"Sink me, if I can," smiled Berwick, good-humoredly. "Hunt's cottage ain't in working; who is going to take me across the Channel? Therefore here we are — eating, drinking, making merry — for to-morrow we die." And he giggled again.

Jerome Caryl's melancholy eyes traveled with a faint disgust round the company; he dropped into the vacant seat beside Berwick and briefly narrated what had occurred at Kensington.

The gathering listened eagerly, for there had been anxiety under this daredevil show.

As Caryl ceased there was silence for the space of a second, then the Duke of Berwick burst into a great laugh.

"I never thought my little cousin was just a fool!" he cried. "La! to think of it — Oh, la!" His merriment was echoed round the table; relief and the sense of safety lent a greater zest to the enjoyment; above the babble rose the scream of a woman's voice.

"A toast, gentlemen! A toast!"

The dark girl climbed onto the table with the aid of her companion and stood there among the glasses, her own in her hand.

"Here's to the squeezing of the rotten Orange!" she cried, "and may we be all there to see it done."

Vast applause greeted her from all save the lady and her companion, who withdrew still further into the background, and Jerome Caryl, who sat silent.

"Oh, dear, oh, la!" giggled Berwick. "Ain't it amusing? Celia, my dear, give us another toast!"

Celia Hunt leaped lightly from the table.

"Your turn, your Highness," she cried.

Berwick rose and made her a swaggering bow.

"May every Jack in gaol break free as cleverly as you did," he said, then slipped back into his chair as the toast was drunk amid yells of merriment.

Jerome Caryl laid his hand on the Duke's arm. "Sir," he said coldly in a low tone, "you are aware that our enterprise is done — damned? These papers on which we staked everything are gone — we shall not rouse France without them."

Berwick winked.

"We'll manage without France," he said and smiled round the table.

"Your grace knows that is impossible — and we are watched — Sir John Dalrymple knows much — it will be impossible to mature fresh schemes — to obtain those signatures again."

"La! we don't want 'em," cried Berwick. "We have a scheme of our own — suggested by Mr. Porter —" he nodded toward one of the company, "it don't want any help of the Frenchies or the Whigs — la! it's mighty clever!"

"Well, my lord," said Mr. Porter from the other end of the table, "it is quick — and effectual."

And he laughed across at Celia Hunt.

"I do not understand," said Jerome Caryl.

"There now!" giggled Berwick. "Caryl don't understand — sink me if I did at first when they started with their hints — certainly, I didn't!"

He made a lazy gesture over his shoulder. "Come here, my lady and help us explain."

The lady came forward to the table; as the light fell over her face Jerome Caryl gave a little start; he recognized her as the Countess of Breadalbane.

She appeared composed, but there was no color in her face; she addressed Berwick, utterly ignoring the rest.

"Ye ken vera weel, sir," she said in a rapid whisper, "that I and my cousin are here for the ane purpose of getting back from ye the dutiful letters my lord and my cousin indited to be sent to King James — which — seeing the plot is ruined — are better, ye ken, in the fire."

"I don't know where they are," smiled Berwick vacantly. "I enclosed 'em in my letter to my father — la! *I* don't know!"

Lady Breadalbane looked as if she could have shaken him with pleasure; the even voice of Jerome Caryl broke in:

"I have already told his grace that his grace's letters to France were burnt with the rest at Kensington by the Prince."

The Countess's green eyes flashed to the speaker's face; she gave him a long look and flushed.

Berwick's foolish laugh rose in the pause. "That ain't all you came for, my lady," he said. "You know Breadalbane has promised his aid —"

"Ah, hush," she said with a look at Caryl. "Ye ken that Jock is in the Hielands and that is why I came to regain the paper — which — since it is burnt — we will be taking our leave."

Berwick stared.

"La, now, ain't you cautious!" he cried, with his pale blue eyes wide open. "You ain't afraid of Caryl! Sink me if it don't look like it — why Jerome Caryl is to be trusted like your own right hand."

"I hav'na' a doot of it," she answered quickly. "But there is na occasion for ony more than need to be kenning the part my lord takes in this —"

At this a murmur arose from those who had been hushed to catch her words; Porter demanded why Breadalbane should always be shielded when better men came to the fore; and Celia Hunt muttered an audible sneer about Scottish caution.

The Countess Peggy looked round the company defiantly; her eyes fell mistrustfully to the unmoved face of Jerome Caryl; an unpleasant pause was broken by the Earl of Argyll, coming forward.

"I'm awa'," he said, lapsing in his agitation into a broad accent. "I'm no' meddling any further — I came for a paper — the whilk is burnt and I'm ganging — I willna' listen to yer treasonable practices — no, but I wish ye success," he added hastily, "but I'm ganging."

His cousin turned on him.

"Then gang, cousin Archibald," she said angrily. "Take your puir white face awa' — I willna' come with ye — I'm staying."

This redeemed her with the company who murmured approval, under cover of which Argyll slipped out.

"Supposing he goes straight to my cousin at Kensington?" asked Berwick, looking after the Earl.

"He willna'," answered the Countess hastily, "he has gone too deep — he willna' dare to open up what will be exposing himself."

"No, but I wish ye success," mocked Berwick. "But I'm ganging!"

They all laughed.

"Even if he did want to inform — there won't be time," cried Porter. "To-day is Thursday and on Saturday —"

"We shall be meeting on Turnham Green!" shouted another.

"To drink the health of the King over the water!"

"God save His Majesty!"

"Down with little Hooknose!"

"Saturday — and don't be afraid of breaking the glass windows, Mr. Porter!"

"Nor of frightening the horses!" shrieked Celia Hunt.

Through this hubbub rose Berwick's voice:

"Oh, la! Oh, dear! Ain't it amusing!"

Porter scrambled to his feet and thumping the table with a bottle till silence was obtained, commenced to sing in a powerful deep voice:

Oh, our loyal hearts were tired
Of a Dutchman on the throne
And an harquebus we fired
To give the King his own
And across the Straits of Dover
Our gallant King came over,
Came triumphantly over to his own!

They caught up the chorus in various keys.

And across the Straits of Dover
Our gallant King came over,
Came triumphantly over to his own!

Berwick rose, excited by the swinging tune, his tall shadow was flung wavering up the wall and over the ceiling; his underjawed hair face with the heavy-lidded eyes was an almost exact likeness of King James in his youth; Porter looked at him and sung:

Oh, the Dutchman ruled us sourly,
And discontented we had grown,
We watched the Channel hourly
For the King to take his own.

Wildly the chorus rose:

And across the Straits of Dover
Our gallant King came over,
Came triumphantly over to his own!

Jerome Caryl glanced at Lady Breadalbane; she was the only one silent save himself; she sat still with downcast eyes, but he fancied that she was in great anxiety.

Again the stalwart voice of Porter rose:

Oh, the Dutchman went to Hell,
And an English flag in England flew,
And England liked it well
When the King o' England got his own.
When across the Straits of Dover
The English King came over,
Came triumphantly over to his own!

Porter sat down amid ringing applause from all save Caryl, who remarked dryly:

"Surely it should not have been in the past tense, your grace, since these wonders remain yet to be performed."

Berwick slipped back into his chair.

"La, ain't you glum, Caryl! Wait till Saturday —"

The word was echoed round the table:

"Saturday! Let us drink to Saturday!"

Berwick filled his glass with no very steady hand.

"You drink," he said to Caryl, "to the sticking of the rotten Orange — to Saturday, Turnham Green —"

Jerome Caryl looked round the flushed, excited faces; there

was not one there completely master of his wits, not one cool head among them; the only one who sat collected and quiet was Lady Breadalbane.

"You have not explained yourself, sir," said Jerome in a cold disgust. "I know nothing of these plans formed behind my back. I only know that the plot I had in hand has fallen through — and that every man engaged in it is better beyond seas."

Berwick laughed.

"This is none of your labored schemes for landing the French, Caryl — it is a neat little affair between me — these gentlemen and Breadalbane."

The Countess glanced up at her husband's name and looked quickly at Caryl as he answered:

"You still speak in riddles, your grace."

"La! ain't you tiresome? Don't you remember the Grandval affair?"

"My God! Is this such another?"

"No — it ain't so clumsy — Grandval was a damned crazy foreigner who bungled the job —"

"But your intentions, your grace, are the same."

"I tell you — we ain't going to bungle!"

"No firing — the cold steel!" cried Porter.

Jerome Caryl rose from his seat beside Berwick and looked down the table; the light was strong on his grave face and the Countess Peggy never took her gaze from him.

"So — you plan to murder the Prince of Orange?" said Jerome calmly.

There was an annoyed silence; a half-sullen uneasiness seemed to pervade the company, then Berwick said, in an unwilling manner: "It ain't murder — we're just going to

take him off — when he changes coaches at the river — as he always does on Saturday when he goes hunting —"

"Twenty men to one," answered Jerome. "It is murder."

Berwick flushed to the roots of his hair. "You use ugly words, Caryl."

"Yet I state your meaning, sir."

"I said nothing of — murder."

"You spoke of making away with the Prince."

"A lucky thrust — a lucky shot."

"Such as might happen any day," finished Porter.

"In war," said Caryl.

"Isn't it always war — till the King returns?"

"You plan murder."

"By God, Caryl, you go too far."

"Your grace goes farther,"

"In the service of the King — yes."

"Perhaps — honor is above the King."

"No cant, Mr. Caryl," shouted Porter.

"I will not commit murder."

"Who asked it? We want no help."

"But my silence is to condone it."

"You need know no more — if you are afraid."

"I know too much already — by Heaven — too much."

"These words of yours spell — traitor!"

"I am not afraid of that imputation."

"Nor we of you — Mr. Caryl."

"I said only this —"

"What? — no shilly-shallying."

"I will not do this thing."

"You will not?"

"No — nor see it done."

"You cannot help it."

"Mr. Porter, I can endeavor to help it."

"That means — traitor!"

"Your insult is powerless."

"Mr. Caryl — you are a coward."

Here Berwick, who, like every one, had been listening intently to the sharp exchange of words, interposed "I don't think you quite understand, Caryl — la! It has been tried before, ain't it?"

Jerome Caryl turned to the Duke.

"I think you do not understand," he said calmly.

"You know, sir, that we all owe our lives to the clemency of this man whom you would assassinate?"

"Bah!" said Berwick fretfully.

Jerome continued steadily.

"He would not even know the names — he would not even lay on us the humiliation of a pardon. He could have sent us to the gallows by the lifting of his finger."

"Well, why didn't he do it?" demanded Berwick. "Because he was afraid, of course; because he didn't dare touch us."

A loud assent went up; Caryl stepped back a little from his place with a gleam in his eyes.

"This is not the way to win England for the Stuarts," he said.

"Traitor!" yelled Porter again, rising from his seat.

"It is you who soil your cause by these vile suggestions," flung back Jerome.

Berwick rose; his narrow face crimson; he made as if to speak; but Porter, in ungovernable fury, had seized one of the candlesticks and flung it past the Duke at Jerome; as it crashed to the ground, some one drew his sword and Celia Hunt climbed onto the table, shrieking.

"A pretty fellow you to talk!" she cried. "You who let the Master of Stair rob you under your nose — *I* knew him at sight for a spy — and so did you — you canting rogue!"

Jerome did not look at her, but, in the diversion she caused the whole company, glanced round the confusion for Lady Breadalbane; she had disappeared.

"Speak for yourself, Caryl," said Berwick, through the hubbub. "I ain't believing that you wouldn't fall in with us."

But ere Caryl could answer Porter, who had fought his way through the press, struck him full on the chest and Caryl staggering, the two men closed, struggled together, forcing each other toward the door; a yell rose from the room; Berwick gave a loud hysterical giggle; now Jerome Caryl had Porter by the collar, shaking him furiously; he flung him to the ground, instantly opened the door and darted through it.

There was a bolt on the outside and he slipped it; a confusion of noise rose from within; laughter seemingly at Porter's discomfiture; he heard Celia Hunt screaming and Berwick's falsetto rising higher and higher.

"Oh, la! ain't it amusing! Oh, dear, oh, la!"

Waiting for no more Jerome Caryl turned swiftly down the stairs while behind him rose a drunken shout:

And across the Straits of Dover
Our gallant King came over,
Came triumphantly over to his own!

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LOVE OF MARGARET CAMPBELL

AS Jerome Caryl reached the street, softly closing the door behind him, a woman's voice fell on his ears out of the darkness.

"Mr. Caryl! Mr. Caryl!"

He looked about him and discerned a shadow among shadows, a huge coach, a few paces from the house.

In the open door stood the Countess Peggy, the coach light showing her in a misty radiance.

She beckoned to him and he crossed the cobbles to her side.

"Mr. Caryl — I have been waiting for ye. I slipped awa' when they grew noisy — I was wondering if they would let ye go."

She fixed her eyes on his face.

"Maybe they will be pursuing ye?"

"I do not think so," Jerome Caryl answered evenly, "their wits are confused — they hardly know that I have gone."

"Ah — then — come with me — in the coach, it gangs faster —"

"I think, my lady, there is no need," he smiled in some surprise.

But she laid her hand vehemently on his arm. "I want to speak to you — an' ye will be safer in the coach —"

She made a gesture toward the house.

"They may follow ye — come — I will take it across the river —"

There was so much anxiety, and intensity in her face and words that Jerome Caryl was impressed; he might as well cross the river in her coach as not, he quietly assented.

"A look of great relief came over her face; she hurried round to the box where two servants sat, calling to them some instructions in Gaelic, then returning to Caryl sprang lightly past him into the coach.

He mounted after her and the horses started at a brisk pace.

It was a cold, raw night, and the blinds were drawn tight over the windows; the interior of the coach was upholstered in a somber red leather and the one lamp filled it with a gloomy light. The Countess Peggy had at once drawn herself away into the corner furthest from Jerome. She was hatless and her red hair in a confusion of curls, lay spread over her black velvet coat; a gray fur mantle wrapped her about and fell in heavy folds on the floor; round her throat hung a long lace scarf reaching to her waist; her gloves and muff lay on the seat beside her. Something in the situation, the confined strange atmosphere of the coach, the swift motion and the beautiful, curious face of the woman opposite, appealed to Jerome Caryl; he was interested, affected by what he could not tell; he looked at her with no desire to speak and a heavy silence fell. Gradually the frosty mist penetrated and a hazy ring grew round the lamp; the coach swung monotonously from side to side. The Countess Peggy looked up; her green eyes were wild.

"Ye are ganging to Kensington," she said in a voice muffled but steady.

He turned so that he could see her with the greater ease.

"Yes, madam."

The words came clearly above the rumbling of the wheels.

"You are going to inform," she said, with the same steadiness.

He leaned forward a little.

"The Prince will not go hunting in Hampton Court on Saturday, madam."

"Ye are ganging to betray us," said the Countess. "I knew it."

"It is not the right word," he answered. "I shall warn the Prince — no more."

She looked at him quickly and quietly then burst out contemptuously:

"Ye lie! lie! lie! Ye will gie every name ye know to the Prince!"

Jerome Caryl smiled; she sat upright with clasped hands.

"I knew it. When across the room I saw your face as the fule Berwick spoke of his plans. I saw that ye meant to betray us, Ah, they talk of their man's sagacity but a woman can see clearer — Berwick did not see — I did."

"Berwick knows me better, madam."

She took no heed of the quiet words.

"Ye will tell the Prince every name ye know," she said hoarsely. "And if ye dinna — they will discover once ye have lodged the information."

She shuddered further into her corner; her whole face and figure seemed m sty to Jerome in the wavering light; only her eyes, fixed on him, were clear and brilliant.

"Will ye do it — will ye no reflect?"

There was no doubting her controlled agitation, the distress in her accents; Jerome, who had been studying her curiously, spoke now with a deepening of curios ty; he spoke under his breath softly.

"You are not involved —" he said. "For whom are you afraid?"

Her eyes traveled slowly over him.

"My husband," she said intensely.

He gave a little laugh and lifted his shoulders; Breadalbane was a byword for cunning hypocrisy; her devotion jarred as strangely out of place.

"Others beside your husband would fall if I — or any informed," he answered quietly.

She sat up, shaking her furs to the floor. "I care only for my husband."

The coach rattled and shook and the lamp-wick leaped and flickered.

"Only for my husband — and if his share in this is discovered it means ruin — if not death — to him."

The very words seemed to come with an effort from her tongue; she blenched at the bare thought of the possibility she spoke of.

"I shall not mention your husband's name," said Jerome Caryl.

"If ye put them on the track they will discover for themselves."

"Lord Breadalbane has weathered rougher storms."

"He has gone farther than ye ken — and this assassination —"

Her voice trailed off into silence; she sat upright, gazing in front of her; her hands clasped in her lap; as the coach shook on its way, her hair was flung back from her face and Jerome Caryl's sword-hilt rattled against the door; this was the only sound, this and the rattle of the wheels; he thought she was going to say no more and was marveling at her containment,

when she broke the stillness by leaning over toward him.

"Dinna gang to Kensington."

Her voice, suppressed, with a note of agony in it, made Jerome Caryl start.

"I can make you rich," she continued quickly. "We can do anything for you — ask it — anything. Jock can twirl Scotland round his finger. He will give ye any place ye like if ye will be silent."

A slow flush overspread Caryl's smooth face. "Why — you can hardly know what you ask," he said. "It is that I should sanction murder and the murder of a man who spared my life and the lives of all my friends — do you — a woman — wish to see that done?"

She answered desperately:

"I dinna care — if Jock is engaged in the matter — I am Jock's wife."

She sat silent a moment, then broke forth again:

"We would pay ye vera weel — consider," Jerome Caryl laughed.

"You have utterly mistaken me. I am not a spy to be bought by the highest bidder. Nothing shall prevent me from warning the Prince."

She flared into a kind of contemptuous despair. "The Prince! What is he to ye?"

"A man — a gentleman — you cannot say so much for Berwick — or any of his crew."

"In your eyes a usurper," she cried, striving to goad him, "a foreign usurper —"

"Madam — he said to me —'there are some things I will not do' — and I say the same to you now — I will not let that man be murdered."

She was silent again as if she had nothing to oppose against his resolution; she gazed in a strange terrified manner at his calm, soft face, his melancholy hazel eyes and the color of excitement leaped into her cheeks to pale and leaped thither again.

"We must be near the river," he said, and put out his hand to lift the blind.

But she flung out her arm and intercepted him.

"Nay — not yet — not yet — and keep the night shut out. Oh, God, the night!" The next second she was on her knees on the floor of the coach.

"For pity — for God's sake —" she cried passionately. "Ye dinna ken what it means to me —"

He sprang up in his amazement and the shock of seeing her crouching before him with upturned white face, brought the color to his cheek.

"Lady Breadalbane!"

She clung to him in an eager agony of entreaty.

"Show this mercy now — by all ye ever held dear. I canna find words to entreat ye deep enough."

"Lady Breadalbane, I must warn the Prince."

"Ye know not what ye are doing!"

Down at his very feet now she pleaded; her white arms and her fallen hair hid her face as she knelt there, her voice faint with the intensity of her entreaties, as if she strove for her life — her soul.

He lifted her up, trembling a little, and put her on the seat; her hands touched his and he found them cold, her head brushed his shoulder for a moment and her face was close to his.

"Will ye — will ye?" she panted.

"No! no!"

The coach swung on its way groaning. "Where do we ride?" he demanded. "We go over smooth ground now — a country road —"

"No," she breathed, and clung to him when he would have risen and looked from the window. "No! we ride aright!"

It was not London's cobbled streets that they sped over now; smoothly and swiftly they rode along.

"Where do ye take me?" he cried again.

She leaned heavily against his shoulder so that he could not rise.

"Be merciful," she cried. "Dinna gang to Kensington!"

But her emotion, her passionate entreaties, the strange hint of warning in her voice were powerless to touch his set purpose.

"Neither God nor man," he said, "can move me — I have sworn to myself to warn the Prince."

The coach suddenly stopped.

"I also have sworn," answered Lady Breadalbane.

They both rose; something fell with a clatter on the floor.

It was his sword.

She put her foot on it; he looked in her eyes and saw that she had unbuckled it while she had lain against him.

"By God — trapped!" he said softly.

The coach door was opened from without and the bitter night mists floated in. The moon was shining dimly; Jerome Caryl strode to the door; he saw a vast spread of fields before him; Hounslow Heath.

A frosty vapor lay over everything; now and then the moon was hidden; a cruel iciness was in the air.

Guarding the door stood the two Highland servants, immovable, waiting orders.

Jerome Caryl looked from them to the woman behind him.

"Is it to be murder?" he asked with a faint smile.

She shuddered violently.

"Swear on the most sacred thing ye know that ye willna' gang to Kensington."

"The alternative, madam."

She was silent; she trembled so that his sword jangled under her foot, yet she held herself straight and there was no flinching in her eyes.

He answered himself: "It is obvious."

He glanced at the three silent faces.

"No one save a woman would have tricked my sword away — give it back to me."

She caught her breath sharply.

"No — there must be no fighting."

Jerome Caryl's eyes narrowed: "So you are going to have me butchered — like a dog."

She called out in Gaelic to the Highlanders. They advanced to the coach door; a wild scorn sprang into Jerome Caryl's soft face. "Give me my sword," he said fiercely. "I am a gentleman."

Lady Breadalbane made no answer; she never lowered her eyes from his gaze; nor bent her head nor moved, but she could not speak.

He turned to the coach door and leaped to the ground.

A fine drizzle of rain was falling and the grass was sodden beneath his feet; the coach lamps shone on the two steaming white horses and showed a bare branched tree that grew nearby; the place was solitary, silent, ghostly. Jerome Caryl looked round him and his blood rose strangely.

He turned to the great Highlander who blocked his path.

"Let me pass."

For answer they seized him, each by one shoulder; at the feel of their hands on him, the blood rushed to his face, but he held himself still.

Lady Breadalbane came to the door of the coach and looked down on him.

"Will ye swear not to warn the Prince?" she shivered. "Then ye may gang awa' a free man."

His beautiful face turned to her unmoved. "I have answered you."

"Then I hav'na' a choice," she moaned.

Her black figure was outlined against the light interior of the coach as she stood with a hand on either side to support herself, her eyes were very resolute, though her voice fell and broke.

"I met you in the inn," said Jerome looking up. "And I had seen you before — in a dream — I might have known."

She stared at him dumbly; the rain on the roof of the coach made a light sound.

"Some one will warn the Prince," continued Jerome. "I am content that this is in vain."

She lifted her hand to her breast.

"Take him away," she said in Gaelic.

She saw the look on his face; she saw his hands clench, look and movement passed and he walked off quietly between the two huge figures into the darkness.

With a stifled cry she sank back onto the seat and wrung her hands.

The bitter air streamed in through the open door and she saw the black heath and the lighter sky in which the moon

seemed to swing and dance behind the clouds like a lantern held unsteadily.

She dragged at her hair with a curious aimless gesture and crouched far into the corner, hiding her face in the cushions. From the darkness no sound save the gentle one of the rain and the jingle of harness as one of the horses moved.

Then suddenly footsteps, and in the open door one of her Highlanders with blood on his face.

"Ah — so soon! So soon!"

"He has a knife in his pocket — he is fighting for his life like a devil." The man put his hand to his bleeding forehead.

"What do you want?" she asked in a quick horror, yet resolute still.

"Something to tie his hands —"

Her fingers go to her cravat; she loosens it and flings it through the door; it is all she has — why does he fight — she thought he was unarmed, she wanted this to be swift and sudden.

The Highlander catches the twist of lace and is gone.

She stands there staring across the heath, upright in the coach door.

All her senses are quickened; she fancies that she can see even through the darkness, one man struggling with two, defending himself with a clasp-knife — she sees them slip a lace scarf over his head, tighten it round his throat — she sees blood — scarlet as flame, before her eyes and shakes her hands as if she felt it running from them; then she looks at the peaceful, tired, white horses standing with drooping heads in the circle of misty lantern-light; she sees the patches of wet lying on the clay under their hoofs; the bare thorn-tree behind them, the dim hurrying clouds above and the whole scene is

impressed on her as something strange and terrible, every little detail to the slender line of the whip on the empty coachman's seat stands out clearly, never to be forgotten while she shall live.

Up out of the black mystery of the heath come her two Highlanders.

"Is it done — is — sh! — done?"

They answer her that it is done; they are in no way moved; they have been sent on fiercer deeds even than this in the Highlands; one is twisting a rag round his hand.

She takes up the sword from the floor; it feels strange and heavy in her hands.

"Put that beside him — drawn — as if he died fighting — highwaymen are common here."

She gives it to them; then picks up her gray fur and puts it about her shoulders.

"Empty his pockets," she calls after them, and even as she speaks she looks into the corner of the coach as if she saw him there, staring at her.

The rain ceases, and the chill, creeping wind blows stronger, ruffles her hair and the manes of the white horses.

They come back, her silent Highlanders; they lay on the floor of the coach the contents of his pockets; some money, not much; a handkerchief, a watch with the face shivered; a little book with a worn blue velvet cover, some papers tied with a ribbon.

The Highlanders, having done their duty, mount the box.

She stares at these things on the floor, picks up the packet of papers and opens it; a long lock of pale hair falls out and some dust that might have been a pressed flower.

"Where shall I drive, Lady Breadalbane?"

"To Scotland — to the Highlands — to Glencoe! Glencoe!"

She flings herself back on the seat and the door is closed; over her hand hangs the yellow curl and the winter night has fallen in chaos about her.

"To Glencoe! Glencoe!"

CHAPTER XXV

GLENCOE

IT was midday of the thirteenth of February and the snow clouds were blowing up over the Valley of Glencoe.

The whole landscape, encompassed by vast and steep mountains, lay in a cold, leaden gray light, there was no human being in sight and the only living thing visible was the solitary eagle that circled in and out of the fissures in the hills. The clouds rested like a girdle round the mountains, the sides and summits of which showed rifts of the pure melted snow. There were many entries to the valley, desolate winding pathways between the hills, steep avenues, twisting down the rocks; and from the mouth through the center ran a flat and silent stream.

There was no sign of the nearing of the spring; it seemed the very depth of winter; the grass and trees were withered to a uniform tint of grayness; the vastness of the scene made it awful, its silence made it melancholy beyond expression, humanity appeared to have no place in this loneliness; the cry of the eagle echoed like a dismal warning to all who would intrude on his desolate domain and the silence seemed the greater as his scream fell to stillness.

Descending into the valley by its mouth were two people: a shepherd wrapped in a heavy plaid and a woman on a Highland pony. As the valley closed round them, she raised

her face constantly to the sky and the mountain tops as if their rugged splendor pleased her; her face was pale and of a calm nobility in the expression; her brown eyes held an intense look and her curved mouth was firmly set; her gray hood and her heavy, dull brown hair showed off the pure lines of her uplifted square chin and full throat; she took little heed of her companion, a tall gloomy Highlander and when her gaze was not on the stormy sky it was directed down the desolate Glen.

Once she said:

"What a place to dwell — this wilderness!"

And he answered in his Gaelic:

"The Glen o' Weeping! The Glen o' Weeping!"

As they advanced farther into the Glen, a few scattered dull-colored dwellings became visible, mostly situated in the windings and twistings of the steep sides, and as they drew yet nearer the very heart of the valley they beheld, spread before them twenty or thirty rude huts gathered in some semblance of order round a central one of more pretentious size.

They did not seem the habitations of human beings, but more like the quarries or lairs of some strange wild beasts; there were no people about, but from some of the roofs a thin curl of smoke arose.

The girl on the Highland pony, Delia Featherstonehaugh, looked long at the cluster of huts as they neared them.

"The chief of the Macdonalds dwells here?" she asked.

He nodded taciturnly.

They came slowly over the worn and faded heather into the center of the little colony, then Delia slipped from her horse.

"Makian's house," said the Highlander, pointing to the

largest dwelling, and she followed him to the door, leading her tired pony; her garments were blown about her in the wind and her long locks escaped and flew across her face; she lifted her eyes again to the mountains in their grand solitude and her breast rose with the trembling of a sigh.

Her guide struck on the door and instantly it was opened; the Highlander turned with an abrupt gesture to the woman, standing without in the gray.

"A Saxon woman, Macdonald, with a message for you," he said.

An old man, wrapped in a plaid, stood in the doorway, he stared from one to the other as the shepherd continued: "She met your son Ronald in the Lowlands, and he bid her come to me if ever she had need of finding him, and so she came with news of disaster to you, and I brought her thither."

"Disaster?" echoed Makian.

Delia Featherstonehaugh stepped over the threshold. She had a glimpse of a warmly-lighted interior and a group of men playing cards; she stood silent a moment with her hand on the door-post and Makian stared at her.

Then she spoke:

"I am an emissary of the King," she said; she laid her hand on the old Highlander's arm and her eager eyes looked straightly up into his. "I sent you — and all the clans a warning — by your son, you remember, Macdonald?"

He nodded, the men round the fire had risen and were listening, too; her voice rose, gaining in steadiness.

"I warned you to take the oaths to the government — I warned you that the Campbells were preparing a vengeance — "

Makian interrupted.

"We took the oaths — I went through the snows to Inverary and took the oaths."

"Too late!" she answered bitterly. "Too late! Too long you dallied — and maybe I also am too late!"

Again he interposed.

"But we are under the government's protection — I was assured of that."

She came a step forward and her glance took in the men assembled against the background of thick peat smoke; in her gray garments, falling straight from shoulders to feet with her eager, colorless face, she looked like some embodiment of the mists from the mountains that had drifted through their doors; they moved a little away from her as if they were in an awe of her person that overweighed any anxiety that they might have felt as to her message; she saw this and trembled in her desire to convince them of the terrible import of her warning; she recalled to them the hatred of the Campbells; she spoke of what she knew of the policy of the government; of how their submission had been suppressed. She said Breadalbane was at Kilchurn arming his clan, that Argyll was holding Inverness, that soldiers were quartered in Argyllshire and were marching even now from Fort William; she related her own wild journey, the difficulties, the perils, how she had come from England, hastening, never stopping, that she might warn them of the doom preparing; that she might arrest a bloody execution, and her eyes went to the figure of Ronald Macdonald, who leaned quietly against the rude wall close to her.

When the tide of her words had come to an end she stood with panting bosom and dilated eyes, waiting.

While she spoke the circle of her audience had grown; men,

women and children, they were gathered round the hut door, while within stood the old chief and his family with somber faces. But there was silence and no movement from any of them. The girl turned to Ronald with a strange smile.

"You know me, Ronald Macdonald? — you think that I speak the truth?"

He answered slowly:

"I know you and I believe."

His father cried out, struck through his apathy at last: "The Campbells march from Fort William?"

"Ay, I saw them on the road — I slipped past them because my guide knew the shorter, hidden ways."

A sound like a faint wail arose from the gathered crowd; a portentous sense of evil, not to be measured either by exact statement or loose phrasing, possessed them; they all turned their eyes to the Saxon woman in their midst and she in her turn gazed on the one indifferent face among them, the face of the young man Ronald, for the memory of whom she had kept her vow to save him.

"We may fly through Strath Tay," said one.

Delia shook her head.

"The laird of Weem has been secured by the government — ye are surrounded — every avenue of the Glen is — I think, closed. I have done little — only ye cannot be murdered unwitting in your sleep."

"They come for that — these Campbells?" demanded Ronald sullenly. "To slay us in our sleep?"

"They come with full power of sword and fire," she answered.

She rested her weary head against the lintel of the door and again a curious smile moved her lips; she thought of the

last time she had seen him and the present gray scene, the surrounding figures, the loud cursing of the Campbell name, the shrill talk of women, fell away from her. She recalled the little house in Glasgow and the coming of the Highlander, and Perseus, busy writing, plotting, coming to and fro, the even round of the days, excitement and the great hope ahead, the beacon to lead them on, recalled all this with curiosity and no regret even as she pictured the dead brother whom she had loved; once waiting idly in some great house, she had noticed pictures on the walls, a carnival on the ice, a fruit shop, a lady with a fan, she could remember them now, every detail, and as impersonal as these did she see her life of a few months ago, quiet, pleasant pictures, rising in succession, till suddenly they were shattered into darkness and one rose that blotted them out, one figure, one face.

In her recital she had not named the Master of Stair; she had blamed Breadalbane, the Campbells, the government, but she had not named the name of the man whom she knew to be behind it all; she had not hinted that the hand of the Master of Stair was guiding Breadalbane, all of them, that his will and his power were behind the redcoats marching for Glencoe.

They brought her to the fire and made her lay aside her cloak and warm her cold hands; and showed her rough hospitality. She obeyed silently and sat down meekly in the heavy peat reek with a lassitude not to be explained; as if there were no momentous hour at hand, as if her life ran smoothly ahead, as if there were no white faces and eager voices about her, as if no army was marching nearer, with the slow fading of the light, nearer.

One of the women brought her some milk, and came and

kissed her hand and blessed her; she took no notice of either; she was picturing a finely-dressed lady, who held out a miniature from the end of a mauve ribbon.

"My children."

She heard the words again and saw the action, but again the thrill of exquisite anguish with which her own words had come:

"How like! — how like!"

So he had looked when he had bargained with her; when he had given her his word for the safety of her friends; so, too, had he looked when he had betrayed them, only perhaps then he had smiled, he had contemplated her hanged or beheaded and most probably had smiled; he had thought of her utter folly and lifted his shoulders in contempt; and she, the woman who had the picture of his children hanging round her neck, perhaps he had told her something and she had also smiled — or pitied.

These thoughts had been her companions during her journey; they would not be shaken off now. As ghosts they grinned through the peat smoke. Unbearable, they became at last; she went to the door and watched the clan assemble.

Over everything was that sense of fear aroused, of wrath held in leash, before every one was that picture of the passes filling silently with red-coated Campbells; of strangely-armed soldiers coming from Fort William, steadily, with bloody purpose, still nearer; in every mind was there thought of Jock Campbell of Breadalbane, wronged, insulted, moving at last from his quiet with a terrible revenge. To all the little glens and colonies messengers went out; Sandy and Ian Macdonald dragged out ancient guns with watchful eyes up the pass, Makian gave commands calmly, women looked on

grimly and put their children behind them; over everything that sense of oppression of disaster gathering in silence; before all that vision of the Cambpells coming steadily.

One man alone stood apart, Ronald Macdonald wrapped in his plaid, indifferent against the open door.

The gray day was growing grayer; up from rifts and hidden valleys in the hills came the tacksmen of Macdonald; contained, silent, in a moment comprehending, in a moment seeing that picture of the Campbells, of Strath Tay held, of Breadalbane rising in Invernesshire, of Argyll rising in Argylshire, of themselves surrounded, trapped, sport for the enemy food for his sword. Small they appeared beneath the vastness of the hills, the wild splendor of the tossing clouds, the wide spread of the sky, not more than seventy men, all told, and Delia's heart cried out within her.

As the daylight faded it grew colder; so cold that the children were taken back into the huts; a few flakes of snow fell across the grayness of the sky and drifted lightly onto the shoulders of the men.

Would they wait till it was dark? Would they come tonight?

The question went from mouth to mouth; Makian bitterly cursed the government that had so foully deceived him; he spoke of the assurances the sheriff had given him that they were safe. And Delia thought of the suppressed oath and her cheeks went hot with shame; they misplaced their curses; one and only one deserved them, but she could not speak his name.

They were gathered together to leave the valley, packing their few poor goods, calling up their herds, their ponies —

there must be some outlet to the Glen unguarded, unknown to any.

They said very little; dread and fear were among them as a living devil, clutching the throat of each; only the little children wailed, miserably, because of the cruel cold and the strangeness of this desertion of the fireside for the chill heather.

Delia turned to Ronald who gave no sign.

"You do not come?" she said; she noticed that he was pale, haggard and preoccupied; he lifted wild eyes to hers.

"Her husband will be among them — I gave him his life once — I shall not touch him now — I will not fight the clan that holds Margaret Campbell, though she spurn me for a coward."

Then he added simply: "I shall be very glad to die."

His carelessness threw about him a grandeur, lifting him above the others, each one eager for his own life; Delia looked at him and laid her hand on his folded arms.

"I too," she said quietly, "better to be dead than to be — alone. And I have no purpose in life."

The long line of ponies had come up; the bundles were strapped on them; the Macdonalds were moving to and fro.

Then it happened Delia dropped her hand from Ronald's arm and cried out:

"The soldiers!"

They had come at a full gallop round a turn in the Glen; at a full gallop they came over the heather and at a shout from their leader drew up a few paces off.

As suddenly as the falling snow or the rain will cover the ground, so suddenly had these soldiers appeared and spread themselves across the Glen before the Macdonalds could fly

or scream or warn each other; before they could do anything save realize their peril.

The leader of the redcoats was almost in their midst, in the security of his steel cuirass he defied them; he was a large red man with a freckled face showing under his black beaver; his horse was panting with the speed of his gallop, he patted her neck carelessly, while he spoke:

"Macdonald! surrender, in the name of the King — " he swept his glance over the confused array; he noted the preparations for flight.

"So ye have been warned of my coming!" he said and laughed.

Across the Glen spread the soldiers, cavalry and foot; the last light gleamed in their steel collars and muskets; Makian, at the head of his people, looked sternly at the leader who swept off his hat with another laugh; his red hair was blown back from his face and his light eyes gleamed as he spoke for the third time: "Ye know me, Macdonald?"

"Ay," answered Makian in an impassive voice. "I know you, Robert Campbell of Glenlyon. I know not your errand."

Captain Campbell lifted a gauntleted hand against the darkening sky, beckoning his men nearer.

"I come to root out your cursed den of thieves," he said. "By the command of Scotland and the King."

"Ye lying Campbell!" cried Makian. "We are under the protection of the King! I took the oath."

"Too late," smiled Glenlyon. "Ye are approved traitors and rebels, therefore surrender."

At this Delia Featherstonehaugh came from the side of Ronald and crossed the wet heather between the Campbells and Macdonald till she came to Glenlyon's saddle bow.

"Captain Campbell," she said.

He looked down at her in a quick surprise.

"Take care," said Delia. "I know — I know that the submission of these people has been suppressed. Glenlyon frowned, and his eyes were curiously intent on her.

"Who are you, mistress?" he asked.

"Does it matter?" Her words came quickly, she put her hand on his rein; both soldiers and Highlanders watched her in silence. "What authority have you? Take care how ye satisfy a private feud under cover of the law."

"I obey my commands," answered Glenlyon, still gazing at her, "I have the letter here," he touched his breast. "Higher than I, mistress, must answer for this day's work; Hill, Hamilton, Breadalbane and the Master of Stair."

He smiled at her slow look of horror.

"What are the Macdonalds to you?" he asked.

"I came from London to warn them," said Delia in a vague manner. "But surely it is in vain — what are you going to do?"

"My orders are to slay every Macdonald under seventy — and pay particular attention to the old fox and his cubs."

"My God! oh, my God!" she slipped to her knees and clung to his stirrup in a distracted manner, with her wild eyes staring fixedly; she made no appeal beyond that cry and the agony of her glance; she knelt there ready for his horse to trample her to death.

Glenlyon stooped from the saddle and loosened her hands gently; then he beckoned to one of his soldiers.

"Take her away," he said with a flushed face. "Take care of her," and as the man lifted Delia from the ground, his gray eyes dwelt on her face in a troubled manner.

She made no resistance as the man led her away, and Glenlyon turned fiercely to the Macdonalds. "Lay down yours arms and surrender," he commanded. "I'll not wait much longer."

They had watched his parley with the girl in silence, knowing well that there was no escape for them; that on their first movement the soldiers would fire; so they stood, gathered together with somber faces, fronting the Campbells. The snow was falling faster; the great clouds had almost obscured the mountains.

Glenlyon drew out his watch.

"Hamilton said five," he muttered.

It was now five minutes past; he glanced over his men; the Argyllshire regiment, all Campbells, then repeated his commands to the Macdonalds to surrender.

Makian refused and a full murmur of scorn went up from the Macdonalds.

"Then I shall fall on ye without mercy — men, women and children," said Glenlyon.

There was no sound from the Macdonalds save the faint wail of a frightened child; the chief stood in front of them, his sons beside him. Ronald was not there.

"Fire!" cried Glenlyon.

The volley of musketry echoed down the Glen; a savage cry of triumph broke from the Campbells, as, flinging their guns aside and drawing their swords, they dashed on the Macdonalds.

Delia Featherstonehaugh saw the world about her struck with strange confusion; she slipped from the soldier who held her and ran blindly down the Glen through the smoke.

The report of the guns echoed from the mountains, rang

in her ears; she saw smoke curling from the huts and one burst suddenly into a bright flame that rose heavenwards.

She heard the guns discharge again and a distant answer to them float from the hills; horsemen flew past her; one fell and his companion leaped over man and animal and was gone into the smoke; screams rose and thick cries of triumph and hate; figures formed out of the smoke and were lost again; a second time came the roll of musketry from the hills, nearer now. Delia found herself leaning against the rocky side of the valley, watching, listening, dumb — not blind. A shrieking boy rushed past her, two soldiers after him; one had a bleeding face.

From the burning hut a woman came running, alight from head to foot; there was no outcry; she flung up her hands above her blazing hair and fell forward on her face.

The musketry cracked again; a horseman galloped by with a Highlander clinging to the saddle; they were striking at each other with knives; the Macdonald dragged the Campbell from the saddle and the maddened horse plunged over both.

It was almost dark; Delia stumbled forward from her place and ran along the rocks, crying to herself.

She came into a circle of light cast by the burning dwelling and stopped, moaning.

A rider swept up, cried out at sight of her and flung himself from the saddle. She felt him seize her and drag her away.

"Ye will be slain," he kept saying and he hurried her from the shrieking confusion into the dark of the cold rocks and wet heather; once her companion put his arms about her and lifted her over a fallen man. He held her close against his

breast a moment; the musketry still cracked in their ears and the snow was falling over them.

Delia struggled away to stare into her rescuer's face.

It was Glenlyon.

He had her firmly by the arm.

"Ye must come into safety," he said hoarsely, and he drew her along, supporting her over the rough way; her cloak had fallen and he put it about her.

At that she spoke.

"Why are ye so careful of me, Robert Campbell? There are women dying down there." She pointed to the dip of the valley they were leaving where the red light and the smoke rose through the darkness.

"It is over now," he answered in a troubled manner. "We killed no women if we could help it — Hamilton is coming — I must get ye into his camp."

"There are others will die of cold this night — let me join them, Robert Campbell!"

But he held her firmly. "Who have ye among the Macdonalds?" he asked quickly.

"Robert Campbell — let me go!"

Through the dark his voice came strained and labored.

"I cannot — ye will be hurt — let me be with ye — ye can command me."

She gave her arm such a sudden wrench that his grasp was slackened for a second and in that second she had freed herself and was running back through the darkness toward the deadly circle of light.

As she reached the first hut the red glare that lit the way showed things that made her blood run cold.

The soldiers had left their work to pursue those that

had fled into the mountains; Hamilton was late; it had been bungled; some of the avenues from the Glen were left unguarded and so many of the Macdonalds had escaped.

She hurried on through smoking ruins and sinking fires; to right and left lay the dead, frozen in their blood; stained and torn plaids were scattered over the heather; here and there a musket was flung down or a dirk, or a household implement hastily snatched up and cast aside.

The flames of the burning huts were sinking under the snow; the cold numbed Delia's very senses, horror and dread were frozen into apathy; the icy air, the bitter soft snowflakes chilled the heat of wrath and terror in her blood.

She came through the dismantled dwellings to Makian's house; it still stood; the door was broken off and a man with his plaid over his face lay across the threshold; by his white beard, blood-stained and trodden into the mire, she knew it for the old chief.

She crept past him and into his ruined home; the peat fire still flickered upon the hearth; the place was warm despite the wind that whined through the torn door.

In the very center of the room a man lay on his back with his hands outspread.

Delia stole to the fire and stirred it into flame, casting on peat from the pile beside her; then, as the light leaped up she turned to the prostrate man and saw that he was Ronald Macdonald; she went on her knees in silence and lifted his head onto her lap; he made a little movement and put his hand over his breast; she saw that his coat was torn and stained and that the sluggish blood was dripping from a cut in his forehead. With a shudder she looked about her, called aloud till she grew frightened of her own echoing voice and

was silent for very horror. Half-mechanically she tore off the cambric ruffles from her sleeves and then gently laying him back upon the floor, crept to the door. In a little hollow of the rocks she saw the snow had collected; hither she carried an earthenware pot and filled it and brought it back and set it on the fire and waited its melting with a silent, wild face and busy fingers tearing her ruffles into strips.

She searched the hut for wine, but there was none; broken, empty bottles lay among the fallen cards.

As best she could she washed his wounds and bound them up, made her cloak into a pillow for him and edged him a little nearer the fire.

Then she fell into sick weeping, shuddering tears as she wiped the blood from her fingers.

He moved again and spoke:

"Have they gone?"

She caught the whisper and bent over him.

"Yes."

He moaned faintly.

"I am so cold — and sick — lift me up a little."

She took his head onto her lap again; his eyes, a ghastly, icy blue in his white face, fluttered open.

"Have any escaped?" he whispered.

"God knows — Macdonald."

So cold it was, so cold, and she so helpless; she cast more peat on the fire and prayed that some one might come; that some one, in this valley of the dead, might be living and come.

Through the long, bitter night she knelt so, holding him, till her limbs were stiff with his weight; he spoke no word, only his struggling breath showed that he lived.

With the first breaking of the pale gray dawn, he turned his head toward the open door.

"I hear horses," he said.

Delia started from a half-swoon.

"I hear none," she answered.

"They come," he whispered. "I am dying so slowly —"

"God knows," she said wildly.

Another silence as a faint light filled the room and the winter dawn spread above the mountains; then he spoke:

"When I am dead — take my pouch," he said through labored breaths. "It holds — Dundee's spy-glass — I want ye to have it — for staying by me now — "

She cried out in a passionate pity.

"I would not have left a dog, Macdonald!"

"So cold," he whispered. "The world is freezing into death — I see the mountains changing into snow and falling — I feel the earth dissolve into an icy sky and all my life ebb from me — so cold — hark! — the horses!"

Delia could hear them now.

"Why, there is hope," she cried, "some help is here."

Even while she uttered the words the entrance was darkened by the approaching horsemen. Now some one had slipped from the saddle and was standing on the threshold.

The dying man shuddered in Delia's arms. "Margaret Campbell!" he murmured.

Lady Breadalbane turned sharply to him.

"So one Macdonald lives!" she said, and shivered through her heavy furs.

"Have ye brought forty Campbells to murder him!" shrieked Delia.

Lady Breadalbane looked in keen curiosity at the haggard woman who held the Macdonald's head.

"Do not use that word!" she cried. "We are innocent of this night's work — innocent, I say! Who are you to look so at me?"

"Why have ye come?" asked Delia bitterly.

For answer the Countess swept across the room, dropped on her knees beside Ronald and took his hand.

"I came," she said in an eager tone, "to find if any lived — to find you — Ronald — we are innocent, you understand — innocent!"

He was gazing up into her lovely face with a passion even the chill of death could not quench utterly.

"What do you want — Margaret Campbell!"

She snatched a paper from her bosom and held it with a trembling hand out to him.

"Put your mark to this," she answered hoarsely, "to prove ye believe that my lord is guiltless of this — "

"Ah!" burst out Delia, "is not Glenlyon your husband's man?"

"Silence!" commanded the Countess. "I speak to him — "

"What has he to gain from you that his last act should be to testify to a lie?"

"It is no lie — this is government work not ours!"

Delia raised flashing eyes.

"Then if Breadalbane is innocent — wherefore do ye trouble?" she cried.

"That he may prove to all the world the Macdonalds hold him guiltless — Ronald — will ye put your mark."

"No," said Delia. "She asks too much — by Heaven, too much!"

"Ronald — I will kiss thee," breathed the Countess. "I will put my arms about thee — hold thee even as she does — to my bosom — so thou mark'st this."

He turned from Delia toward her.

"Breadalbane is blood-guilty to the soul," he gasped. "Yet kiss me — and I will sign — thy lie."

She took a pen and inkhorn from her pocket, dipped the pen and put it between his slack fingers — while Delia tried to force her back.

"Ye shall not do it!" she cried desperately to Ronald.

But he took no heed of her.

"Kiss me — " he murmured, "Margaret! Margaret!"

She caught hold of him, thrusting Delia aside. "Margaret!"

"Sign!" shrieked the Countess at sight of his face, but he rolled out of her arms between them.

"Ye are too late!" cried Delia, springing up.

Lady Breadalbane gave one look at his dead face, then rose also.

"Well, we do not care, Jock and I," she said in a quiet fury. "I think there are no Macdonalds left to harry us — and we can face the world."

She turned to the doorway and beckoned the man who stood there.

"The man is dead," she said, flinging back her red hair. "And he has not given testimony, Glenlyon."

"No, thank God, thank God!" sobbed Delia wildly.

Glenlyon looked from one to another.

"My lord must bear his own deeds," he said slowly.

The Countess's green eyes blazed.

"This deed is not his," she cried. "But thine, Robert Campbell!"

"Do you deny me, then?" he answered heavily.

"Ay — thee and they works — never look to my lord to share the burden of the blood that ye have shed to-night!"

"So — ye cast me off?" asked Glenlyon thickly.

She laughed magnificently.

"If you say that my lord bid you do what you have done — why then we do — cast you off, Glenlyon."

"There are others know the truth."

It was Delia spoke.

Lady Breadalbane glanced at her fiercely.

"You?" she said.

"I — and Jerome Caryl."

The Countess fell back before the name and clutched at the lintel of the door; then recovered herself and laughed aloud.

"He is dead — your Caryl."

Delia shrieked.

"Dead!"

"Who was he that he should not die?"

"Dead!"

"Have I not said so?"

"How died he?"

Lady Breadalbane put her hand to her bosom and drew herself to her full height.

"Put the deed down to those who did this work about you — there are those who did not care to see him go free from Kensington."

"He was — murdered?"

"He was found dead."

"Jerome dead! By whose orders?" Delia's tone had dropped to dullness. She seemed to be re-acting some old and ghostly

dream; she had said such words before — and now the answer came the same.

"The Master of Stair," said the Countess, looking her full in the face. "They found him dead on Hounslow Heath which was the more likely — highwaymen or the Master of Stair?"

"Ye think that by his orders Jerome Caryl was slain?"

"I leave it to ye," answered the Countess and with a fierce abruptness she was gone.

They heard the thunder of her escort down the Glen as the Campbells swept away.

Delia came forward with clenched hands.

"Three," she said in a choked voice, staring down at Ronald. "God bear witness that it is three that he has taken from me — three men wantonly slain."

She put her hand over her distorted face and swung round toward Glenlyon.

"Why have ye stayed?" she asked.

He came slowly near to her, looking at her strangely. "What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Live. Live to — " she dropped her hand from her face and pressed it to her bosom. "I am going — to make a man pay the price of the blood he has shed — to pay the price."

"What is your name?" asked Glenlyon.

"Delia," she said indifferently, and she moved toward the door; the cold light was full on her pale face and her long fallen hair dark over her shoulders.

Glenlyon followed, his sword clanking on the floor.

"Come with me."

His voice came unsteadily. "You may command me," he said.

As if she suddenly realized him, Delia lifted her head; he flushed under his tan, and in a troubled way took off his beaver. "Give me — your hand — if I might."

The brown eyes considered him: "Robert Campbell — what do ye mean?" she asked wildly. "I have my life's work — I have told you — "

"Will you come with me?" he asked again. "Will you — trust me?"

Delia's glance fell to the dead man; then she looked away down the valley: slowly back at Glenlyon.

"I think I will," she said, and held out her hand.

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER I

THE RECKONING

IT was the very height of spring in Edinburgh; the middle of May, 1695; the warm sunny day was fading into dusk and the street lamps were lit and glittering yellow through the twilight. Before a magnificent mansion in the finest part of the city, a large crowd was gathered, an angry crowd that surged up and down, murmuring dangerously.

And in the front room of the mansion a man sat alone and listened to that ominous sound without.

The vast room was unlit and the long windows open to the balcony and fresh spring air; the heavy furnishing was splendid to excess; its one occupant sat before a gold harpsichord, leaning against it, with face turned toward the window; close to his elbow stood a crystal vase of early white roses and violets and on the white wall behind him was painted a cluster of hollyhocks and pinks.

He was sumptuously attired in heavy white satin that shimmered in the dusk; round his neck hung the dull gold knots and roses of the collar of St. George, and below his knees the bright blue of the Garter showed; there were patches on his face and his black ringlets were elaborately curled and powered in the front.

His unbuckled sword lay along the harpsichord; now and then as the murmur rose to a shout he laid his hand upon it

and his black brows frowned. For John Dalrymple, first Earl of Stair, felt very keenly to-night what it meant to be the best hated man in Scotland.

After a while he arose with a stir of perfume and crossed midway to the window.

The crowd below had gathered in numbers; they pressed close against his iron gates; and from the confusion of voices one word rose distinctly:

"Glencoe! Glencoe!"

The Earl of Stair stepped onto the balcony and at the sight of him there rose a howl of execration; he frowned down on them with the bitterest scorn and turned into the room again.

A stone crashed up at the balcony and again came: "Glencoe!"

He glanced at the clock and rang a bell; when the servant appeared in answer, he asked for lights. "And order the coach," he said.

The man hesitated, stopped.

"My lord — my lord — you will not go abroad?"

"To my Lord Breadalbane's reception," answered the Earl.

"My lord — does your lordship hear the mob?"

The Earl flared with impatience.

"I do not ask your attendance — if there be one man in my service not a coward let him drive, it will suffice."

The servant bowed and withdrew, and the Earl stood silent in the center of the room until the man returned and, lifting the candles, set the room in a soft glow.

"Draw the curtains," commanded the Earl.

The servant obeyed and as the pink satin was drawn over the dark, without a low groan rose from the waiting crowd.

The Earl crossed to the harpsichord, picked up his sword and buckled it on.

The servant softly left the room, and the inner silence was unbroken till the rattle of the coach into the yard below. The crowd gave it a low, dangerous greeting as they passed and clamored against the iron railing.

The Earl turned a glance out of narrowed eyes at the shrouded windows and his ringed finger shifted his sword up and down in the scabbard.

A light footstep made him turn; it was his wife.

He frowned; she passed in silence to the harpsichord and with an agitated look at him sank into the seat there.

"Will you not send for the soldiers, my lord?"

She spoke in a troubled way; with halting utterance and a nervous foot tapping the floor; the Earl considered her a moment; she was pale, her blonde head set off against the crimson and purple of the painted flowers behind her; her mauve and gold gown shone in a bright reflection on the polished boards; a cloak of a delicate opal color was clasped with diamonds over her bosom, the rich black and white of the ermine lining showing as it fell apart.

"You are not coming with me?" was his answer, noting her.

"Yes — " she gave back hurriedly. "You see — I am dressed — "

"Yesterday, you said you would not accompany me, madam," he commented coldly, "and I see no need."

"I should prefer to, my lord."

"Why?" he frowned.

"I — I do not care to be alone — these people outside frighten me."

"There are the servants."

She moved uneasily. "I do not trust servants — indeed, I would rather come."

He looked at her curiously; it was rare indeed for her to be anxious for his company; though since his father's death with no one to foment it, the bitterness between them had grown less active, still he was surprised that she should so far depart from her usual silent avoidance of him as to desire to accompany him to-night — to-night when his servants shrank from driving with him through Edinburgh Town.

She waited his verdict anxiously, her slender fingers pulling heedlessly at the roses and violets beside her.

"Why not send for the soldiers?" she repeated at length. "They are dangerous to-night — these people."

He lifted his shoulders contemptuously.

"I am not afraid of them. It is no more than they have done before. I was never a favorite of the mob."

"Yet these are in earnest — this question of Glencoe — "

He turned on her.

"Madam — do not let me hear that word. An insensate party cry — begun by the Jacobites; spread by my enemies — a meaningless parrot call — what is Glencoe to me? An act, two years old — a thing cursedly bungled or Hamilton had not left any alive to start this howl."

"Yet the King has ordered an inquiry and appointed a commission, has he not?"

The Earl smiled bitterly.

"Madam, my enemies have forced the King to head the stronger party — what does he know of it? Nothing."

The servant entered with his master's hat and cloak;

Lady Stair rose with a faint color in her cheeks and drew her hood around her face.

They descended the stairs in silence; below the secretary met them with an attempt to keep the Earl within the house.

The footmen had refused to ride behind the coach (the Earl was not beloved by his servants). Yet to go unattended: Lord Stair smiled unpleasantly.

"Dismiss them," he said briefly, and himself opening the door stepped out into the portico.

Between him and the mob was the cobbled yard, behind the high iron railings, yet it seemed as if this would little assure him safety so fierce a shout burst forth when it beheld him.

The Master of Stair had always been hated; though his magnificence, his generosity with money, his recklessness in politics were qualities likely to be beloved by the populace, his excessive arrogance, the horrible tales connected with his house, his aloofness, his lack of amiable vices, his swift and brilliant rise from a mere advocate to the most powerful man in Scotland, were things not to be forgiven by either high or low.

And he had always been on the unpopular side, always served the law not the people; he was merciless too, and reckless in making enemies; they who for two years had been working to spread the tale of Glencoe, found that to give some or any point to the general hate of the Master of Stair was as easy as putting a match to gunpowder; the mob shouted "Glencoe!" — as they would have shouted anything that voiced their long dislike; high and low, all Edinburgh, had combined on this pretext to pull the Dalrymple down.

The Earl stared at the mob a moment and his blue

eyes darkened; he knew well enough the value of their shout of horror at Glencoe and despised them the more utterly; he was not afraid that all his enemies together could accomplish his ruin; he had England behind him; and during these three years his worldly success had swept him on and up beyond all meddling with.

He helped his wife into the coach; she had turned even whiter: as the crowd shouted she trembled: her husband took no heed of her.

One of the servants ran forward to open the gates: the people drew back quietly, waiting in an ominous hush.

The coachman whipped up his horses and dashed through the gates at a gallop. Howls, curses, shrieks arose and the mob made a wild onset, but the hoofs of the four plunging horses kept a passage clear and the coach swept free. But the crowd followed and closed about it. Lady Stair cowered in a corner. Stones rattled on the roof and mud was flying at the windows; stones and sticks struck the coachman, the carriage came to a standstill and a wild shout burst forth.

The Earl cursed fiercely and flung the window up; they shouted up vile names at him and mouthed foul versions of his misfortunes till his cheek was dark with passion.

With a hard face he slipped his hand to his pocket.

"Listen!" he pulled the door open and leaned forward. "If ye do not leave go of the horses — if one of you come a step nearer — I'll shoot the dog." And he lifted his white and silver gloved hand closed round the glitter of a pistol.

For an instant his firm reckless facing of them discomposed the crowd, yet the sight of his lowering dark face as greatly roused their wrath anew.

"Ye damned Dalrymple!" shouted one man. "Answer for the bluid o' Glencoe!"

As he spoke he leaped to gain the open doorway of the coach.

The Earl seized him by the collar and hurled him backwards into the mass. "By God!" he cried with blazing eyes, "I'll have the law on you, you hounds — I'll have you whipped and hanged for this."

His fierce voice rose above the clamor and stirred fury beyond awe. There was a wild dash at the coach and in another moment the mob would have dragged Earl Stair to his death. But Lady Stair had risen from her place in the interior, forgotten by her husband, unknown of by the mob.

Now she caught his arm and slipped into view in the doorway.

"Don't fire!" she said; she lifted a beseeching face.

The carriage lamps fell on her bright fairness and the shimmer of her dress; the night wind blew her hair and ribbons about her; in the sudden surprise of her appearance the crowd was silent.

The Earl's hand dropped to his side.

"Surely you will let us pass," she said, looking round her in a gentle way.

There was no one there who had any wish to shed blood before Lady Dalrymple; she was greatly beloved in Edinburgh and neither her beauty nor her fearlessness failed of their effect.

"We willna' touch ye, mistress," cried a man. "Stand awa' frae yer husband."

But she had laid her hand on the Earl's breast and though he sought to move her, kept her place.

"Ye hae a bad lord!" shouted another. "But ye are a gentle leddy — stand frae the Earl — "

"Madam — retire!" cried her husband, very white.

But she took no heed of him.

"Give us leave to pass," she said very softly.

They fell away from the carriage door; it was obvious that they would not touch him while she was there; the horses, suddenly freed, dashed ahead.

The Earl drew his wife inside and closed the door.

"Now, why, madam, why that?" he demanded breathlessly.

She drew away with a little shudder to the farthest corner of the coach.

The crowd had fallen away to right and left; they were proceeding unhindered.

"What did you think I should do?" she answered.

He seated himself, leaning towards her. "Did you accompany me, madam, that you might play my good angel?"

She looked away.

"I knew that they would not touch you while I was there."

In utter amazement he stared at her.

"I am much beholden to your — charity," he said haughtily.

She glanced round, saw his expression, and the blood flew into her face.

"Spare your gratitude, my lord," she said bitterly, "I would have done as much for any."

He frowned. "I did not think that I evoked your peculiar solicitude," he answered. "Doubtless you like to display your exemption from the hatred my house is held in."

"My lord!" she cried, "that savors of your father's tongue — and is unworthy."

"You must pardon me," he said in a proud voice, "but I am not used, madam, to be an object of pity."

Lady Stair gazed from the window blindly on the dark streets.

"I did not use the word, my lord."

"Madam, you performed the act."

She turned suddenly in a half-desperate manner. "Do you suppose that I *want* to see you hurt — or killed?" she asked.

He lifted his eyebrows; his face with wrath was near as white as his dress.

"I should not have imagined that it would, madam, have greatly afflicted you."

Her blue eyes glared at him curiously.

"You strangely misunderstand," she said slowly, "you are very hard — but I — of late, I have grown more passive — what does it all matter? Think, my lord, what you will." She rested her head against the cushions and her hands fell together in her lap; her husband turned his head away sharply; her presence was a fret, her sad face a reproach; she had been very quiet of late; from one month's end to another he took little notice of her, but to-night she was forced on him; he could not help seeing her delicate soft fairness, her drooping mouth; he could not get away from the unhappiness she was a symbol of.

They drove in silence; idly Lady Stair pulled at her fan and stared out of the window; moodily he traced patterns on the coach floor with his scabbard point, his face turned from her. So they galloped through Edinburgh and thundered into the courtyard of Lord Breadalbane's house.

CHAPTER II

FOREBODINGS

THE musicians were playing the delicate melody of a pavan in Lady Breadalbane's ball-room, the air was heavy with the scent of the white and pink roses that decorated the walls and the rhythmical movements of the dancers were reflected in smooth pale floors.

In a little card-room opening on the ball-room sat Breadalbane and the Earl of Stair, in converse.

Breadalbane appeared ill and anxious; his delicate face was pale and drawn, his manner strained to composure and quiet. Their discourse lay round the word now in the mouth of all Scotland, Glencoe.

"Ye hae heard?" said Breadalbane, "that the King's commission appointed to make the inquiry canna be kept off it ony longer. The feeling is ower strang."

The Earl of Stair's foot beat time softly to the pavan; he gazed with an inscrutable face toward the distant dancers.

"Tweeddale and the other privy councilors will hold this investigation in a day or so — even ye, my lord, canna stop them."

Still the other made no answer.

"Ye hav'na'," continued Breadalbane, "the power ye had, my lord, tho' to the world ye seem at the pinnacle o' fame —

but the Presbyterians and the Jacks together will be too strang for ye noo."

The Earl's blue eyes flashed.

"I do not dread the inquiry," he said. "Albeit it is conducted by my enemies — my bitter enemies, Johnstone and Tweeddale."

"Ay," answered Breadalbane, "ye hae mony enemies, and they'll ruin ye if they can, but 'tis *ane* bitter enemy has wrought this."

"Who mean ye?" frowned Lord Stair.

Breadalbane lifted his shoulders.

"I dinna ken — ye should ken best — some one has been at work — persistently, during these three years this tale has been abroad, through the non-jurors, the Jacks — to your enemies in Parliament — till all Scotland is roused. Who is at the bottom of it?"

Lord Stair turned slowly to the speaker.

"A tale springing from the Jacks," he said scornfully. "Will any believe it? It does not trouble me. I have not even heard their version."

"Ye are ower sure, Lord Stair — the work has been slow but certain — the tale is in every mouth."

"What tale, my lord?"

"The tale o' what they call the massacre o' Glencoe."

"What do they say?" asked Lord Stair with a disdainful smile.

"They say that the Macdonalds were murdered by your orders — they say that the soldiers entered the Glen by black treachery, feigning friendship, that they lived there ower a fortnicht, feasting and drinking, that they rose one nicht and murdered the clan in their beds, butchered them,

men, women and children, with every cruelty — that is the tale they tell, Lord Stair."

"It is a lie."

"Yea — it is a lee — but ye canna, I ken, prove it a lee. The inquiry will be behind closed doors — it will be conducted by your enemies; ye hae all Scotland believing this lee — and against ye."

Lord Stair spoke impatiently.

"Every soldier under Glenlyon knows that this was a military execution — every man among them can disprove this wild tale of the Jacobites — "

"The Argyllshire regiment is in America," said Breadalbane, "and I hav'na' seen Glenlyon since he left my service suddenly — disappeared — "

Lord Stair seemed struck into a frowning silence for a moment. At length he asked:

"Whom will they examine — these commissioners?"

Breadalbane lifted his light eyes.

"Sandy and Ian Macdonald who escaped — Keppoch and Glengarry — I dinna ken — what others — I am nae in their secrets."

Again in silence Lord Stair looked out across the ballroom; the delicate melody of the pavan came exquisitely through the roses.

Lord Stair's mouth curved into a little smile; he did not fear; he despised his enemies; that they had discovered such a weapon as this against him roused his bitter amusement more than his wrath. He disdained to be moved by insults raked from the very mud of the gutter; he cared nothing for tales started in Jacobite pamphlets. No remorse troubled him with regard to Glencoe; he was too sure of himself, his

great position, the King's friendship, to tremble before the Scottish Parliament.

"Let them open the commission," he said loftily, "let them listen to the lies of Highland savages. I shall not lift a finger to prevent them. They must have a party cry — as well Glencoe as any other."

He took one of the roses from the bowl on the card table and pulled idly at the curling leaves; his eyes were carelessly following the figure of his wife as her gold embroideries flashed among the dancers.

Breadalbane watched him curiously.

"Ye are ower easy, Lord Stair. Ye ken the ugly things the inquiry will reveal? How they took the oath and it was suppressed — for your ain purpose."

Lord Stair flicked a torn petal from his white sleeve.

"I had authority to suppress what I choose, my lord," he answered indifferently. "The oath was invalid — as it came in too late, and so I treated it. Besides, have you forgotten that I had the King's warrant?"

A faint smile touched Breadalbane's thin lips.

"Will the King stand by ye?" he asked. "Will he no' say that he didna' ken what he signed?"

Lord Stair sat silent. Breadalbane's keen insight had brought him to the truth. Stair thought of that day at Kensington when William had signed the order without reading it, and for the first time a vague uneasiness touched him; he turned at last, half-angrily.

"Why this anxiety on my behalf, my lord?" he demanded. "You had a share in this business, yet you are safe — thanks to your prudence."

The pavan was over. Lord Stair watched his wife till she

had gone out of sight with her partner; he had pulled the rose away to the heart and absently he played with the pile of petals on the table beside him.

"Mae mon's prudence," remarked Breadalbane a little bitterly, "can take account of such a mischance as this — some one hae been working in the dark — some black steady malice hae been accomplishing this."

"The malice of the Jacks," suggested Lord Stair with a smile.

"It's mair than that, my lord — is this story that makes England and France shout shame on us and the mob pelt us as we pass, a mere invention of the Jacks? Ye hae a bitter secret enemy — my lord — canna ye guess at one wha might do this thing?"

Lord Stair dragged the pilfered rose across the table, leaving the gold pollen dust staining the inlaid wood; he still smiled.

"I know of none — my enemies are numerous — but not — my lord, secret."

The violins commenced a gavotte. Lady Stair crossed the floor, Mr. Wharton was her partner; her husband looked at them and reflected that Mr. Wharton was too often in Edinburgh; these three years had not softened his dislike of the good-humored beau.

Breadalbane spoke again.

"Ye are mistaken — the maist deadly of your enemies is the hidden one wha hae trumped up this tale."

"Maybe it is an enemy of your own," answered Lord Stair. "Maybe you, my lord, are the object of this spite."

"It is na directed against me — if I fall it will be only in complication wi' ye — they hav'na' mentioned me — it is always ye, Lord Stair."

A little silence fell; no voices broke the spirited measure of the gavotte; Lord Stair trifled lazily with the ruined rose; Breadalbane watched him covertly.

The candle-light gleamed softly on the round arms and bare shoulders of the women as they passed between their partners and courtesied, each reflected in the long mirrors lining the room, so that three Lady Stairs appeared to be dancing, one in profile, one full face, one with her back, all clad in satin that caught rippling lights and gleaming shadows, all smiling, faintly.

Lord Stair spoke at length.

"My letters — that I wrote at the time of this affair — you kept them?"

"They were vera imprudent — yes, I kept them."

Lord Stair lifted his blue eyes; they were dark, a little troubled.

"You can give them back to me, my lord, there is no need for them to serve Tweeddale's turn."

The music crashed to its climax; the three Lady Stair's advanced, receded, bowed with the glittering shaking of a cloud of gold embroideries.

"Send me those letters," repeated Lord Stair. "I shall be obliged, my lord."

A curious look passed over Breadalbane's face.

"They are nae langer in my possession."

"What do you mean?"

"Tweeddale sent for them — to be examined —wi' your letters to the Commander of the Forces."

Lord Stair flushed and turned quickly in his chair.

"And you sent them?"

Breadalbane smiled.

"Yes."

"Now — by heaven, my lord, that was ill done!"

Unmoved, Breadalbane lifted his shoulders.

"I must show my authority — I canna tak' the blame — ye wrote them, ye must even tak' the — credit, Lord Stair."

"You have treated me unworthily."

The Earl of Stair was breathing fast, he clenched his hand on the rose petals and his angry eyes glanced disdainfully over his companion; but Breadalbane kept his composure.

"As ye mak' naething o' the affair," he remarked dryly, "ye dinna need to care that the Marquis o' Tweeddale will be reading your letters."

"Care?" echoed Lord Stair. "I care for none of it — you, my lord, behave according to your nature. I am your guest. We will let the matter of the papers pass. After all I should not have expected otherwise, and I am not ashamed of what I have written."

Breadalbane was quiet, slightly discomfited by the magnificent manner and person of the man whose reckless imprudence his cunning despised.

Lord Stair rose, sweeping the petals in a cloud onto the floor; bowed, and passed into the ball-room.

The gavotte was over, the company stood about in little knots; as Lord Stair passed he heard fragments of their converse; it seemed that they talked of nothing save Glencoe, Glencoe and the impending commission.

Johnstone was there, his fellow-minister and rival; he crossed the room to make some smiling remarks to him upon the current topic.

"Ye have some enemy at work, my lord," said Johnstone with a pleasant spite.

Lord Stair gazed at him in a disdainful silence, but the words pierced the armor of his splendid scorn.

Had not Breadalbane said the same? Some secret enemy working his ruin.

He thought it over gloomily; it was part of the curse over the Dalrymples, perchance, part of the bitter curse that at last, after he had stifled the miseries of his personal tragedies with brilliant, mighty success, he should be pulled to ruin by some unknown enemy.

He had seated himself in front of one of the great mirrors and gazed frowningly at the company; his wife passed with Tom Wharton; he took no heed of her save to wonder bitterly what she would do were he ruined, if such a wild thing happened and he was brought low. What would she do? He thought grimly that her company would not trouble him in that case; doubtless she would be glad of the scandal of his disgrace to cover the scandal of her desertion; the thin chain that held her would be snapped, when the world turned on him so would she; he was sure of it, and he reflected how easily his fortunes, his name, his honor could be pulled to the dust if Tweeddale and his faction triumphed.

But his arrogance dismissed even the shadow of humiliation; he had been howled at, reviled, threatened before; this storm would pass as others had done; he had weathered too much for a paltry matter such as this Glencoe affair to overthrow him.

With the calm of his conscious pride he looked round on the brilliant crowd. He was well aware that most of them were his ill-wishers, he would not have been to the trouble of turning his head to conciliate one of them; they might say what they

would of him, he would stoop to neither justification nor defense.

As the music recommenced, his wife advanced into the recess. She seemed agitated and to hesitate, and paused looking at him strangely.

"The things they say!" she breathed quickly. "Have you heard?"

His face hardened, disdaining to answer. He glanced away, but she, ignoring the repulse, crossed the polished floor with a sweep of satin and put her hand on the back of his chair.

"It is not true, my lord," she asked, "this tale — it is some slander of the Jacobites?"

He looked at her sideways in a manner that made her blench.

"Has my Lord Wharton been giving you his version of this tale?" he asked.

She answered, very quietly.

"He — and others — it is in the air — and because I know — something of what happened three years ago when this affair of the Macdonalds was first broached — "

"So — you care to remind me of that?" he interrupted hotly.

Her wide eyes held a mournful steadiness.

"Why not my lord? You need not fear any knowledge of mine! That the Macdonalds actually took the oath is now common talk — tell me — is this story of the massacre the truth?"

Very intently and earnestly she looked at him.

"It is horrible," she said, "the cruelty — the treachery — babies slain and little children dying of cold — my lord, my lord, you did not sanction it?"

He turned his head slowly toward her.

"You may think so if you will," he answered coldly.

Her hand fell from his chair, she drew back a step.

"Then — it *is* true?"

"I shall not deny it — if you care to think so you may."

The look of aversion that was so at variance with her soft face sprang into her eyes.

"Is that your answer? You will not deny it?"

"No," he said indifferently, "neither to you nor to any other."

"They will ruin you for it," she cried breathing quickly.

His eyes flashed; he thought she would had she dared have finished her sentence, "and I shall be free."

"They may try," he said. "It will interest you, will it not, madam?"

She flung up her head in a desperate manner.

"It interests me more to know whether you are or are not the infamous wretch these people paint you."

Lord Stair's usual pallor deepened. He tightened his lips and would not speak; his wife considered him with baffled eyes, hesitated, then broke into open appeal.

"I would take your word," she cried.

"With a little kindness of voice or tone or look, with a gentle gesture, a denial of the guilt that was at least not his, he could have won her now, won her to believe in him, to stand by him; he knew it but he would not soften, retract or explain, not by so much as a little word would his pride deign to bridge the gulf between them.

He stared at her coldly with a bitter smile.

"Madam, I shall not offer you my word," he answered. "It is of little matter what you think of me."

She moved away from him quivering, with outraged eyes.

"Very well," she said below her breath, "I shall know what to think of you. If you did this thing — if the blood of those babes is on your head."

He rose suddenly; the George hanging to the collar of knots and roses heaved and glittered with his angry breathing.

"Keep this talk for those who are your usual company, madam," he said fiercely. "What do you think the brats of savages are to me?"

And he swung out of the recess into the ball-room.

Lady Stair looked after him, and her gentle face grew hard; her delicate hand waved her fan to and fro, slowly under her chin; she stood erect, silent.

The music crept to her ears in a slow melody; the gently moving fan kept time with it; with narrowed eyes she turned and looked at herself in the mirror.

It was a tragic face she saw there, a hopeless face.

With a curious impulse, she leaned forward and kissed the lips of her reflection, kissed the cold glass and smiled into her own eyes, with an utter sadness.

CHAPTER III

THE TRIUMPH OF THE CAMPBELLS

THE guests had gone; the roses hung limp and faded; guttering, dying candles cast a dull light over the Countess Peggy as she stood in her deserted ball-room.

She leaned against a mirror; her red hair fell over her bare white shoulders and purple dress; at her bosom drooped a cluster of crimson roses; with anxious eyes she looked at the gray-clad figure of her husband, who sat beside her in an attitude of utter weariness.

"What will be the end of it, Jock?" she asked in a hushed voice.

"Ruin for the Earl o' Stair," he answered, "They've set their minds to it, Tweeddale and his crew, and they'll na be letting him escape, there is enough against him to hang him — though he'll no' be persuaded of it."

"Let Lord Stair go," said the Countess, "I dinna care — what will be the end of it for *ye*, Jock?"

He gave her a tender look.

"Why — they hav'na' ony evidence against me, Peggy— I didna' put my name to rash letters — they canna prove onything — I'm safe enow — and sae is Argyll — though he is half-demented wi' fear."

"But this trumped up foolery o' Glenlyon feasting a fortnicht in the Glen, Jock — that touches us — "

The Earl smiled.

"It doesna' — Glenlyon had his commands frae Hamilton na frae me — and Glenlyon — Glenlyon hae been bought by the Jacks — I hae heard — this vera evening — that he hae appeared and will be examined before the commissioners."

"But however Glenlyon lee — we can disprove that the Campbells were in the Glen a fortnicht."

"We can," answered the Earl, "but we willna'. Dinna ye see, Peggy — we must ken naething o' what occurred — we were miles awa' — at Kilchurn, we must say — we ken naething — naething. If we disprove lees that dinna harm us we must reveal the truth — which wad be vera damaging."

"Then Lord Stair will indeed be ruined," said the Countess slowly. "But it is na ony business o' ours. Ye may trust my silence, Jock."

She moved to the window and pulled aside the curtain; the stars hung bright and luminous above the sleeping city; a church clock struck one

The Countess Peggy leaned her head against the mullions and her face fell into lines of weariness; she twisted the ends of her bright hair in and out of slack fingers and the withered roses on her breast, crushed against the window-frame, shed their faded leaves at her feet.

Many of the candles had guttered to the socket and gone out; only two or three, burning ghostly before the tall mirrors, remained to cast a light through the darkened room.

Silence and loneliness were abroad; the Countess gazed up at the infinite distance of the stars and shivered through her slender body; against the sky rose a misty vision often seen by her: the vision of a man with a beautiful face and clothes

clay-stained and bloody, holding a lace cravat and looking at her with mournful eyes.

She smiled bitterly as she thought of the uselessness of that blood on her soul; Jerome Caryl might have lived. An obscure traitor had informed and the plot to be carried out at Turnham Green had come to nothing.

She turned from the stars and her eyes sought her husband.

"Jock!" she cried, and there was a world of tenderness, of appeal, of passion in her voice. "Jock!"

She crossed the great shadowy room to where he sat and went on her knees beside him.

"I did it for ye," she murmured, as if answering an accusation. "Jock — I hae served ye weel?"

He took her hands in his and smiled down at her.

"Peggy, ye ken vera weel ye are all the world to me," he said most tenderly.

Her head drooped against his arm.

"Then I dinna care for onything," she whispered. "Yet at times I'm no' sae brave — I'm afraid."

Breadalbane's wide light eyes gazed across the dark.

"Afraid o' what, Peggy?"

She drew a little closer to him.

"Of wraiths — o' the dead."

He smiled, fondling her hair.

"I wad'na' fear when dead what I had'na' feared when living, Peggy."

"Nay, nay, I dinna fear — at least I'm no' afraid, Jock, when ye are close — but — Ah, Jock — wad I could forget!"

He frowned above his smile.

"Are ye thinking of the Macdonalds, Peggy?"

With a little uneasy movement she lifted her head; her

long throat gleamed unnaturally white above her dark dress.

"Sometimes — I — think o' the Macdonalds."

Breadalbane laughed as if he cast aside some foolish fancy.

"We hae triumphed ower the Macdonalds, Peggy — the auld thief Makian got his deserts."

"Yea, I ken."

"And Ronald Macdonald — ye hated him, Peggy."

"I ken," she said hastily, with yearning eyes on his face. "I wad I might forget."

"Wherefore, Peggy?"

"Ah! — sleeping and waking — I see it — the Glen o' Weeping — as I rode through it that day wi' the smoke drifting ower the corpses — and the bitter dawn a-breaking — the bluid ower the heather and the silence, the silence."

With a half-shudder her eyes drooped and her clasp of his arm tightened.

"This is fules' talk," said Breadalbane imperiously. "Sic sights are common in the Hielands — ye ken vera weel — the Campbells hae fed the eagles often enow — I shouldna' hae thought that ye, Peggy, wad hae sickened at the bluid o' the Macdonalds."

"I dinna — but — I canna forget."

Breadalbane's eyes flashed.

"Nay — because the Hielands are clear o' the thieves — we canna forget, when we see Argyllshire and Invernesshire free to the Campbells, when we can ride unarmed with nae to question us — lords o' the Hielands. Ye say weel we canna forget."

She warmed a little in response to his tone. "I dinna regret or repent," she said. "Hate o' the Macdonalds is in the bluid

— it is na sorrow for them but fear — fear maybe, Jock, o' the reckoning."

"We shallna' pay, Peggy — Lord Stair will answer to that."

Lady Breadalbane was silent, only something like a sigh escaped her.

The last candle sank into darkness; only the pale light of the stars and the street lamps without illumined the room.

"And he *will* pay," said Breadalbane.

She started from a reverie.

"Who?"

"Lord Stair."

"Ye think he will be ruined?"

"What else? They will put it all on him — the King canna do less than dismiss him."

"Weel, Jock, we dinna care."

"Nay — I never liked him."

"Nor I — and his wife, Jock, is a fule."

"She willna' abide by him if he be ruined."

"She will leave him, Jock — ye think?"

"I know and he knows — she hasna' a tie to hold her — she will be blithe of his disgrace."

"She hates him — weel, I never knew ony that loved a Dalrymple — they say Lord Stair's mither wad sit on her husband's judgment seat in the likeness o' a black cat — an she hated him — there is somewhat uncanny in the bluid — ye couldna' love a Dalrymple."

"Yet Lord Stair is the handsomest gentleman in Scotland, Peggy," smiled Breadalbane.

"Weel — he is na winning — an there is too much of the auld Viscount, wha made his neck awry striving to listen to the divil, aboot him."

"The divil must be Lord Stair's advocate noo — for there is no one else in Scotland will be."

A silence while they gazed at the paling sky through the long windows; then Breadalbane spoke.

"Peggy — when we gang back to the Hielands — we'll ride through the Glen o' Weeping, ye and I — and ye shall hae anither picture o' it to think on after, when the badges and music o' the Campbells glitter and ring through the ruins o' Glencoe."

"Jock — I am a fule — I dinna regret."

"Peggy — my dear, my dear!"

She looked up at him through the vague gray light.

"Jock!" she said passionately. "I am content — an' no afraid o' the living or the — dead."

CHAPTER IV

THE LIE ACCOMPLISHED

IT was toward the end of June; the commissioners had produced their report on the Glencoe affair, yielding to the public demand to behold their conclusions before the pleasure of the absent King was taken.

The Estates of Scotland were considering the verdict of Tweeddale's commission; the verdict pronouncing in measured language that a bloody murder had been committed three years ago upon the Macdonalds of Glencoe, and that the entire cause of this slaughter rested with the letters of the Master of Stair. Public excitement flamed high; the greatest gentleman in Scotland had been declared a murderer and as the details of his crime were discussed, there were many who hoped for the pleasure of seeing the unpopular minister hanged in the Grassmarket. The Parliament, clamored in strong debates, roused after the sluggish years, voted to a man that the King's warrant did not authorize the slaughter of the Macdonalds.

Then Lord Stair's enemies, in the ascendant, triumphant carried against a feeble opposition that the Glencoe affair was murder.

The feeling of the Estates passed almost beyond control; the Jacobites and the Presbyterians caused Lord Stair's letters to be read aloud in the Parliament house; the statements of the witnesses: Ian Macdonald, Sandy, his brother,

some of the surviving clansmen, Glenlyon, Keppoch and Glengarry, were discussed; the story of the entry of the Glen by treachery; the fortnight's feasting and card playing, the Campbells' rising one snowy night to slay their hosts in their beds and drive out the women and children to perish on the mountains, all the details of cowardice and cruelty that gave the story its horror were detailed, canvassed and made much of.

Captain Hamilton was cited in vain at the city cross; at the first hint of the scandal, he had fled Edinburgh. Tales that in contraband, Jacobite pamphlets had circled for three years, were now on the lips of grave men; it was related how, with a generous hospitality, the Macdonalds had received the Campbells who had sworn that they came in friendliness, how they had been made welcome with simple pleasure; pathetic pictures were drawn of a pastoral people, virtuous and ingenuous, living in a state of idyllic innocence. Makian was described, venerable, beloved, trampling the snows to take the oath and returning to his clan at peace with himself and beaming with righteousness.

The trust of these simple folk was dwelt upon; how they had taken the bare word of their ancient enemies and harbored them in perfect faith.

How should they, in their simplicity, have suspected treachery behind the smile of the redcoats?

Dramatic touches, too, were not lacking to this plausible tale; it was related how Sandy Macdonald, awaking one night, had overheard a couple of the soldiers in talk.

"I do not like the work," one said.

"Give me an open fight — "

Then Sandy Macdonald had gone to Glenlyon and asked, in his innocence, if anything was intended?

Glenlyon had slapped him on the back, laughing. "Why, if there had been anything — don't you think I should have given you a hint?"

And Sandy Macdonald, being one of the idyllic people, had no choice but to take a Campbell's word against the evidence of his own senses. And to add to it, the public passion was further inflamed by pictures of Makian and his wife shot dead as they hurried with wine to serve their guests, of babies lying quartered in the snow and women's fingers chopped off for the sake of their rings, of butchered children and of the blood-stained Campbells driving the flocks and herds of the slaughtered people into Fort William. There was silence as to where these captured cattle had originally come from.

The commissioners had been sworn to secrecy and the inquiry had been conducted behind closed doors; of the actual depositions of the witnesses few knew the truth, but their tales carefully invented, artfully spread, were in every man's mouth and the machinations of Lord Stair's enemies had converted the necessary execution of a gang of lawless thieves into one of the most reviled crimes in the annals of Scotland. England and France took up the cry; Justice, they said, had suddenly cried aloud, and no one remarked how curiously silent Justice had been over some of the Macdonald's actions.

And the odium, the hatred, the scorn, the fury, were all directed against one man, — Lord Stair.

He, they said, was the sole author of these abominations; he had suppressed the Macdonalds' oath, he had, under false pretenses, obtained the warrant from the King, he had written letters breathing blood and fire; he had exclaimed when he heard that it had been done:

"I only regret that any of the wretches have escaped."

They had always hated him; these men, and it chimed well with their mood to assume the part of avenging justice and take a pitying interest in these wronged people.

Their enemy had put himself in the wrong before the world; they would see it to that he paid the price.

An address was sent to the King in which justice was demanded and judgment on the Lord Stair as the author of the "massacre" of Glencoe.

A haughty spectator of his own ruin, the Earl of Stair watched these events in silence.

To have shown himself in the Parliament would have been to court instant arrest; he was asked for no defense or vindication and his pride would not permit him to offer one.

The King was in the Netherlands and no further action would be taken until his pleasure was known; but all Scotland had decided that his judgment must affect the estate and probably the life of the disgraced minister.

For his own sake William could not show clemency; mercy to Lord Stair would be complicity in his crime; the King dare not, if he would, blacken himself to save his servant.

On this blue June afternoon, Lord Stair paced his garden; a festival of flowers lying lavishing abroad to the kisses of the sun.

The narrow box-edged paths radiated round a central fountain full of gold carp; a stone figure of Hylas rose from the water-lilies and poured water from a Grecian urn, splashing into the basin.

Trees of box and yew cut into the shapes of peacocks and Chinese pagodas framed the dark background to in-

numerable roses, hollyhocks and bushes of sweet-brier. Leading to a back entrance to the house was a wide flight of steps ending in a terrace, the balustrade being white with jasmine.

Steadily up and down the smooth paths walked Lord Stair, his shadow now before, now behind him.

On the edge of the fountain sat Lady Stair, feeding the carp with cake.

Her wide straw hat tied with black velvet under her round chin threw half her face into transparent shadow; her stiff blue lutestring dress embroidered with silver stars, spread over the dark green grass and glimmered in the sunlight.

Faint clouds floated across the pearly sky and lay reflected among the water-lilies; the gold fish darted through the leaves like jewels and from the urn held by Hylas, sparkled the clear stream of water.

It was perfectly still, far-removed from the noises of the city; now and then a little breeze rose stirring the perfume from the roses and gently bending the hollyhocks.

Lord Stair stopped at last in his pacing to and fro, stopped so close to his wife that his shadow fell over her and the fountain brim.

She looked up, then down again at the water. "I think my ruin is assured," said Lord Stair in a hard voice.

"You have no trust in the King?" she asked quietly.

He answered in a proud bitterness:

"The King! He has not shown himself strong enough to withstand a faction — he, the same as the others, will cast the odium on me."

Lady Stair again looked up.

"What do you mean by ruin?" she asked steadily.

"That, madam, is within the King's pleasure. To save himself he will show me the greater severity. You understand? I am to be the victim flung to the rage of a party — the clamor of a faction." He paused a second, gazing over her head, then he struck his hand down on his sword-hilt.

"It is hardly credible!" he said.

"If what they say is true, it is well-deserved," said Lady Stair evenly. "To your face, my lord, I say it; it is well-deserved."

He glanced at her curiously.

"Ah — you think so?" he said in a contained voice.

"You would give me no denial," she answered. "I think what I must think — I conclude what your silence causes me to conclude."

"It is a matter of no moment," said Lord Stair. "Perhaps — " and he smiled unpleasantly, "it is as well that my downfall will at least give no one pain."

"Perhaps it is as well," she assented coldly. Her ringed hand stirred through the fountain and the water-lilies trembled at her touch; a low passing cloud cast a shadow over the grass. Lord Stair stood silent with a hard and angry face; his wife spoke again.

"Yet I ask you, my lord, what you mean by ruin?"

"Are there, madam, so many forms of it?"

She lifted her wet hand and drew it along the stone brim of the fountain. "I suppose," she said, "that His Majesty must dismiss you from office — I suppose. That is the least he can do — am I right?"

"Yes."

"I suppose — he might touch your estate — your life — am I right?"

"Yes."

"The first, the least he could do would be generous — you think he will not choose it? — again — am I right?"

"Yes."

A spot of bright color burnt in either cheek as she looked up at him; in the shade of her hat her eyes shone brightly.

"He will do the utmost?"

Lord Stair smiled.

"Be content, madam," he said bitterly. "I think he will do the utmost."

She caught her breath.

"And — you wait?"

"What else — yes, I wait."

Lady Stair rose; as she lifted her head their eyes met.

"So," she said very quietly. "You have given me that also — you have made me the wife of a disgraced, ruined man, you have dragged me into a hideous downfall of honor and estate. We of my father's house have kept clear of these things — I think I am the first to be linked to a dishonored name."

He stood silent, looking at her with an inscrutable expression.

"Reproaches from me will not sting you," continued Lady Stair. "Dear Heaven, what are we to one another? I would have been spared this, yet it is a fitting end — "

Her wild eyes lifted and fell; she moved a step away across the grass.

Lord Stair spoke, slowly:

"You are free to do as you will — free as the servants I can no longer pay. Do what is in your mind to do. No doubt they will not blame you — "

"Well?" she said.

He lifted his head suddenly.

"I shall not ask you to share exile, a prison or death with me. I cannot hold you. I know it — only — "

"Well?" she murmured again faintly.

"You said — just now — " he spoke with difficulty, a painful distinctness, "you — had kept clear of these things — you will remember it?"

"I do not understand," she answered.

"I think you do. You are my wife. You will soon be free of me, I think. Until you are, I ask your loyalty. That is all."

"Are you afraid of me?" she said.

"Of nothing." he answered. "Least of all of meeting circumstance. Whatever occurs I can deal with it."

There was a curious expression on Lady Stair's face.

"You are very confident," she said, "yet you stood high and you fell."

He smiled at her.

"Madam — it is a thing that may be done magnificently."

She stood silent a while with averted eyes, then she stooped, picked up her scarf from the grass and turned slowly toward the house.

Lord Stair watched the blue figure with the long shadow crossing the grass; watched her as she mounted the steps, traversed the terrace and disappeared into the house.

The beautiful garden was strangely desolate; he moved away from the fountain and his face was ghastly in the sunlight.

The hours were intolerably leaden; he reflected that he was a free man only till his enemies had the authority for his arrest; restlessness and the desire to use his liberty while

he might made him leave the garden and call for his horse.

As he passed out again he saw through an open door Lady Stair sitting idly with her hands in her lap; he did not speak to her nor turn his head: but descended to the court and rode away through Edinburgh to the open country, and there at a full gallop took the summer wind across his face.

CHAPTER V

A WOMAN'S VICTORY

TWILIGHT was gathering as Lord Stair rode back into Edinburgh; the city lights glimmered through purple haze as the June evening deepened and above the castle that stood black against the sky hung the first star.

Lord Stair was riding slowly from the gate when he had to draw aside to admit the passage of a coach and four; as it swept rattling along the narrow street he recognized the silver and murrey of Lord Wharton's liveries.

Evidently my lord was returning to London; the Earl glanced after the coach with a strange satisfaction and smiled to himself as he noted that the blinds were drawn. Lord Wharton was likely to be afraid of the night air; he pictured him with his hands in a muff seated on cushions as the coach swung through the open gates onto the country road.

Lord Stair went on his way; there were many people about, some excitement or uneasiness appeared to be abroad; he wondered grimly if the messenger from the King had arrived and if these churls mouthed his news already.

No one recognized him in his plain riding-gear; he pulled his beaver further over his eyes and turned into the main street; here the crowd was denser; many were armed; he touched up his tired horse and was breaking into a trot

when a girl stepped out from the passers-by and put her hand forcibly on his rein.

"Lord Stair!" she said in a quick whisper.

He stopped, looked down.

"Lord Stair — dinna gang hame!" she said earnestly.

He leaned from the saddle to catch her whisper. "You know me?" he asked easily.

She nodded.

"I hae seen ye ride frae the Parliament, Lord Stair, — dinna gang hame to-nicht!"

"Why, mistress?"

Her eyes glowed in the shadow of her hood.

"They're ganging to burn yer house, Lord Stair — to-nicht — I ken it a' for ma ain Sandy is in it — sae — dinna gang hame!"

She dropped her hand, trembling with excitement.

"Ye canna save yer house, yet ye can save yer life."

He drew himself erect in his saddle and looked in the direction of his home.

"This is Tweeddale's and Johnstone's setting on."

"Ay, Lord Stair — and the mob will make for yer life."

"I will go and demand soldiers."

"It willna' serve, Lord Stair — they are a' in league wi' the mob."

He knew very well that her words were true. "Thank you, mistress," he said with a sudden smile. "But I must go home — and quickly. I should never have left the house — I did not guess at this."

"Why, Lord Stair? Why must ye gang hame?"

"Because of the Countess: she is alone. Thank you again, mistress."

He lifted his hat for a second and then turned rapidly down the street.

So it had come to this: often had he been face to face with popular wrath; often had he dared and flouted the whole of Scotland and now the crash had come. He glanced down at the people he rode through and his soul shook to think that he should have come to be at their mercy. His mansion was in complete darkness as he rode into the courtyard; it was with a sense of relief that he noticed the empty streets before it, the mob had not gathered yet.

No servant came forward to take his horse; he left the tired animal and entered the house.

One of the footmen stood in the hall, looking pale and frightened.

"Are you the only one?" said Lord Stair.

The man assented in a cowed manner.

"Melville — has Melville gone?"

"Yes, my lord — we heard there was a design to burn the house. Mr. Melville went and the others, my lord."

"I think the information was correct," said Lord Stair quietly. "You had better follow. Only first there are the horses. My own is outside — take him and the others to the old stables at the end of the garden. I think they will be safe there. Let me know that it is done and you shall be rewarded."

"Yes, my lord."

Lord Stair was moving down the shadows of the hall when the man called after him:

"There is a lady waiting for you in the drawing-room, my lord. She would not be denied."

"Waiting for me?"

The Earl paused on the first stair and looked back through the darkness at the speaker.

"Yes, my lord."

"Her name?"

"My lord, she gave none."

Lord Stair was silent a moment. "Where is the Countess?" he asked.

The man did not answer.

"Where is she?"

"My lord, my lord."

At the tone, the exclamation, the Earl gave a little start.

"She is in the house," he said sharply.

Slowly, reluctantly, came the reply.

"No, my lord."

And as the man spoke he saw the Earl put his hand out swiftly and catch hold of the banisters.

"When did she go?" came through the shadows and Lord Stair's voice shook a little.

"Soon after Mr. Melville, my lord; when she heard they meant to burn the house, my lady put on her hat and had her mare saddled and rode away."

"Leaving no message?"

"None, my lord."

A pause while the shadows seemed to thicken, blotting out all traces of light; then Lord Stair spoke, quietly:

"That will do. Go and look to the horses."

The man obeyed, disappearing quickly, and Lord Stair ascended the gloomy stairs of his deserted house.

Groping aimlessly through the darkness he pushed open the first door he came to and flung himself into a chair.

So — his wife had gone — he had never expected it, like this, so brutally.

He remembered Lord Wharton's coach and the closed blinds and cursed himself for a fool that he had smiled — why had not some devil's whisper prompted him to send a bullet through those deceitful windows and kill the two that rode within?

And she had talked of her honorable house! It was part of her woman's cunning — that he might leave her — safely trusting her cold dignity!

He started up with some wild idea of following them, but by now they would be miles on the road; he did not doubt that one day he would kill Tom Wharton; but to-night it was madness; he was deserted and alone, still he had himself at least in hand to face whatever came.

Yet the next instant his impulse was to ride after them at any cost, at any price. She might have waited! A dull agony came over him, he dropped his head on his outspread arms and the dark glimmered with horror.

The curse! To the last shame and misery it was being meted out — an accursed race — accursed.

The word beat in his brain like a drum to execution.

Accursed, abhorred; great and famous as he had been but yesterday, there was not one who would stay to help him meet this moment now.

He was used to standing alone; he had an immeasurable courage, yet his wife's defection had robbed him of half his strength.

Let her only have waited a little longer — possibly a few poor hours longer and she might have been free indeed.

He rose up blindly and felt for his sword. It was completely

dark, only the long window glimmered ghostly at the other end of the room. As he moved he knocked a table over and there was a crash of china as the vases struck the floor, he paused, leaning against the wall with his hand to his sick head.

The room opened into the drawing-room by folding-doors; it seemed, as if, in that other chamber, some one was moving, some one roused by the falling table.

Suddenly a candle appeared like a star in the distance, coming nearer through the dark. His blood leaped for a moment; it might be that she had not gone — it might be that she had returned.

"Ulrica!" he cried hoarsely, "Ulrica!"

But now the candle cast a glow on the person carrying it; a woman, but too tall and stately for Lady Stair.

She came to the open doors and stopped; her light gray dress appeared luminous against the darkness, and a black hood was pushed back from her pale, set face.

She held the candle in a hand so trembling that the flame wavered and the wax dripped over her dress.

"Is it you, Lord Stair?" she said faintly. "Is it you?"

In an instant he knew her; in an instant it was all plain to him, as the key to the cipher she explained everything; his secret enemy, the one who had worked his ruin in the dark — he heard her words of three years ago as if she spoke them now.

"If you push me too far I may pull your fortunes about your feet."

He moved into the center of the room.

"Delia," he said, "Delia."

She shrank back.

"Do you know me, Lord Stair?"

"I know you — and — now, what you have done."

The candle only faintly dispelled the thunderous summer dark; crossing the threshold she stood it on the chimneypiece, where its double shone from the mirror, a dim ghost. Lord Stair's figure showed obscurely with a trailing black shadow behind it.

"Why have you come?" he said in a low voice.

With one hand on the chimneypiece and her face showing in the flickering candle-light, Delia spoke in a quiet shuddering manner.

"As your downfall has been coming — slowly, Lord Stair, have you never thought of me? As Glencoe has been dragged to light — slowly — have you never thought of me? As your enemies have risen around you with this forged tale to dishonor you — have you not thought of me? As you have heard of witnesses suborned, of cunning lies to displace you, have you never thought of me?"

He stood immovable.

"I have thought of you. Yet I did not think this was your work."

"No — you would not, Lord Stair — yet from the first whisper to the consummation it is my work — day and night for three weary years I have given body and soul to this end and now I think I can say — I have avenged my dead."

Her voice had no ring of triumph in it; on her last word it fell to a sob; she leaned back against the wall and her head fell forward on her bosom.

Lord Stair came a step nearer.

"So — you set yourself to ruin me?"

"Yes, I."

"From you sprang the tale of Glencoe?"

"Yes, from me."

"You caused the Macdonalds to bear false witness?"

"I have been at the bottom of it all, Lord Stair."

She raised her head.

"I have put that upon you you will never be free of," she said wildly. "Throughout the world your name is stained with the blood of Glencoe. Nothing can efface what I have done."

He moved still closer.

"Women are marvelous," he said curiously. "I did not think that you so hated me."

He took her by the shoulder and looked into her shrinking face.

"I did not think that you so hated me," he repeated.

"Have I not cause to hate you, Lord Stair?" she demanded hoarsely. "I swore that as you had been false, cruel and merciless, that even as that dear blood cried out to me — you should pay to the last bitterness."

His hand fell from her shoulder.

"Why have you come here now?"

She moved away blindly through the shadows, her hands clenched tight on her bosom.

"Have they all gone, Lord Stair — all?"

"Yes — they are lackeys."

"And your wife?" said Delia suddenly.

His utter silence answered her; she turned about in a strange and desperate manner.

"Is not your wife here?"

"Do not push me, mistress," he answered thickly. "My affairs will bear no meddling."

Delia cried out passionately:

"Poor coward — so she could not be loyal to the last — she knew perhaps what I am come to tell you — that to-night the mob are coming here."

"What you came to tell me?" he exclaimed.

She crushed her hands together in a helpless manner.

"They mean to kill you I think — Johnstone is setting them on — O God in Heaven!"

She turned to the mantelpiece and pressed her forehead against the marble slab; her hood had fallen back, and the candle-light flickered over the soft hazel curls.

Lord Stair was watching her.

"Your three years' work is accomplished," he said. "You came to tell me so?"

She was silent; her head drooped lower on the mantelshelf.

"You came to tell me so," he demanded. "You came to triumph, Mistress Featherstonehaugh?"

He smiled faintly as he looked at her; she started at the name he used.

"I am Captain Campbell's wife," she said. "Glenlyon's wife these two years."

There was an almost imperceptible pause before he answered.

"That accounts for another false witness, Mistress Campbell."

"Yes," she whispered, "yes."

"He has lied to please you?"

"What else?"

"You married Glenlyon that you might bend him to serve you now?"

This time she lifted her head and looked at him with wild eyes.

"Yes."

"You have not stopped at anything to attain this end," said Lord Stair. "Madam, you should be more triumphant now that it is gained."

She advanced a step toward him.

"Yea, I am clear of my vow," she said in a distracted manner. "I think they lie quiet in their graves — I have done it — the blood of Glencoe — it is on you — always."

She sank into a chair, leaning forward over the arm staring across the dusk as if she saw something menacing her. Lord Stair picked up the candle and flashed it before her face.

"Why have you come here?"

She looked at him behind the candle flame, and for the first time saw his face clearly; their glance met.

"Oh, you are changed!" she said in a terrified tone.

"And you also," he answered somberly.

With a wild little laugh she bent nearer into the circle of light.

"I have dreamt we might meet like this — through the dark — both so different."

Her words trailed off, she put out her hands.

"Take away the light — I cannot look at you."

She slipped from the chair to her knees.

"What have I done — what have I done!"

"Why, you should know — you have done what you set out to do."

In a tone of numb despair she repeated: "What have I done — what have I done?"

Lord Stair set the candle on the table.

"You had better go, Mistress Campbell — and join your allies who come to burn my house."

"I came because of that," she answered wildly. "I came to warn you — my courage failed — I could not let it happen."

On her knees, with her hands clasped on her bosom and her head bent, she leaned against the chair, heavily.

Lord Stair turned to her with a swift fierceness.

"This is a woman's paltriness," he cried. "To do the thing and lament it — I had liked you better if you had led the mob you have incited instead of this — "

"I would not have them kill you," she murmured.

"Oh, get up from your knees," he said, scornful. "You are true neither to your love nor to your hate! Get back to your kind and carry through what you have begun."

There was a confused distant sound without.

"They are coming!" shrieked Delia.

"Well, you knew it," he smiled: "Go you and join them."

She rose to her feet; the noises, the shouts and the steady tramping were coming nearer.

"And I have done this," whispered Delia. "What did you mean — true to neither love nor hate?"

"Look into your heart," he answered. "Was it love that made you pull me down — was it hate that sent you here to-night?"

She caught at the chair with cold fingers.

"I have made my affections stronger than my love — I have put honor and loyalty above my heart — and I came to-night because my soul turned weak as water to think of your death."

She paused; her breathing came with difficulty.

"Will you not go, Lord Stair?"

He had gone toward the window; a vast crowd were gathering without, the red light of torches flickered across

the courtyard, and threw into view faces here and there in the sea of people.

The door was suddenly burst open and the solitary servant rushed in.

"My lord, my lord! they are certainly going to destroy us! They have gunpowder with them."

"Save yourself," interrupted Lord Stair, — he took a purse from his pocket and tossed it across the room.

The man groped for it in the shadows.

"There is Lumley's, the jewelers in the Cannon Gate my lord — he is under great obligations to your lordship — if you would take shelter there."

"You are a good fellow," said the Earl. "Go to Lumley — I may follow — the horses are in safety?"

"My lord, yes."

The man hesitated at the door.

"Your lordship will not try to save some of the things — papers — or plate — ?"

Lord Stair laughed, a fierce sound through the darkness:

"No — nothing. What value is any of this to me compared to what I have already lost? Get you gone."

The servant withdrew and the Earl turned swiftly to Delia.

"And you mistress, go and join your people without — do you not hear them shouting? Go and add your voice to those cursing the Dalrymples — and be content — for to-night all curses are fulfilled."

She moved slowly nearer to him.

"And what is your thought of me, Lord Stair?"

He made an imperious gesture as if he would have swept her intruding presence aside.

"I have no thought at all for you."

He stopped, listening; from the confusion of sounds without arose the crackling of flames; he went to the window; fagots and gunpowder had been piled in the court and flaming tarred torches flung into the midst; red lights began to dance in reflections over the floor; and smoke swept in faint clouds past the windows. Lord Stair felt a cold hand touch his and turned to look into the face of Delia.

"For God's sake," she whispered, "for pity's sake."

He made an impatient attempt to shake her off, but she clung to his hand desperately in a frenzy of entreaty.

"It is burning — don't you see that it is burning — make haste — at the back through the garden."

The triumphant shout of the crowd as they saw the flames rise almost drowned her voice; an unnatural red glare blinding, horrible, filled the room from end to end.

Lord Stair glanced round.

"Your work, mistress, your work," he wrenched himself free of her. "Go without there yonder and laugh at it."

She was crying and sobbing like a mad woman.

"What have I done — I have been crazy — crazy — "

With fallen hair and the red light over her from head to foot, she ran to the door; he followed. The door was burning, the oak stair threatened; flames were already showing in the hall.

Delia wrung her hands, shrieking and moaning to herself, calling on the living and the dead in her distraction; she ran a little way down the wide stairs, then at sight of the flaming door fell back with a scream.

"Ye should not have come," said Lord Stair.

"Your place is with those who lit the fire."

Her wild eyes lifted to his figure.

"Do you think I am afraid for myself?" she cried. She came back to him with outstretched hands and thrown back head; as she stood there, poised above the smoking hallway with the flickering light and shade across her distorted face, she seemed as unearthly, as terribly strange as her surroundings.

Lord Stair, gazing at her, saw the look in her eyes he had seen in his sister's and in his own; it was as if there fronted him the evil genius of his house; once this woman had looked at him differently; as he stared at her he recalled that other expression, the other look her brown eyes had once held in place of the madness that flashed in them now.

Certainly, she was mad; he saw her against the background of the polished stairway where the flames were reflected; he saw her lean back against the balustrade with those wild eyes upon him in her uplifted face; he noticed the crimson light on the long line of her throat and in the curve of her white lips.

"Lord Stair."

She bent forward, touched him, the hideous noise of flames gaining power, the shouting and cracking of timbers filled the air with a terrible menace.

"Lord Stair."

Her fingers touched his arm, closed round; and he could not escape from her face, turn his eyes away.

"Speak to me," she said; she was as calm as she had been frantic; her long hair, loosened, glowed a dusky red behind her marble white face. But he thought of his wife and would not.

"I have nothing to say to you."

He caught hold of her, not tenderly nor roughly, indifferent, merely.

"Make haste — down the stairs," he said. "On the first landing you may cross the library and gain the garden."

The grasp tightened on her arm.

"Come," he commanded, and drew her after him, leading the way.

She did not speak until he paused to open the library door, then she looked back into the flame-lit hall and cried out she would die.

Paying no heed he was dragging her into the dark room when something rushed out of the door, between them and up the stair.

"What was that?" cried Lord Stair; he let go his hold upon the woman and stepped back.

Half-way up the stairs a little black cat peered through the oaken rails with ears cocked and its green eyes glittering with excitement; round its neck was a tumbled bow of scarlet.

For a moment the man and the animal gazed at each other, then the Earl began reascending the stairs.

"What are you going to do?" cried Delia, barring his way. "You are not going back? My God! Look how the flames are mounting — they will cut off your escape."

Lord Stair looked up at the kitten.

"It is alive," he said, "and I cannot let it burn."

"You are mad!" shrieked Delia, clinging to him. "The house has only a few minutes to stand — they have gunpowder."

He pushed her aside.

"Then get you into the garden," he answered, pointing to the library door. "There is time for that."

"Will you leave me? Will you go to your death?"

"My life is of no moment," he said grimly, "I shall not leave mourners — "

She caught hold of him anew.

"I love you, I love you, and you shall not leave me. I love you — I love you."

He gave a little laugh.

"'Tis a strange affection, mistress — it has done the work of hate — let go of me."

He twisted his arm free of her, his eyes shone curiously.

"I love you," she whispered in bitter agony and fell back against the wall. With no look at her he mounted the stairs; she shrieked after him, called and cried. He stopped and looked down, she was standing as he had left her, half within the library door, her way of escape was clear behind her.

The little cat fled at his approach and galloped ahead of him.

He followed it almost to the top of the house across a landing and through an open door. By the red light from without he could distinctly see this room and all that it contained.

It was his wife's bed-chamber, it looked as if she had that moment left it; by a chair stood her high-heeled house shoes, and the garden hat she had worn that morning; her dressing-table was covered with trinkets, evidently she had taken nothing with her.

He gazed strangely about the room; a little drawing caught his eye; he knew it well, Samuel Cooper's portrait of his dead son; he went up to it and took it from the wall.

She had left it behind, she was Harry's mother and she had done this hideous thing.

As he stood in her deserted room among the details redolent of her, he could think of nothing but this, the bitterness of the thing she had done; he forgot why he had come here, he forgot the burning house and Delia, heavily he sat down with the picture in his hand and gazed round the emptiness.

Irremediable as death and more terrible was this action of hers; he tried to adjust his mind to the difference it must make to his life. Then he considered that it was not life but death ahead of them. Confusion was over him, he could not think clearly; he rested his head against his arm and groaned aloud, then the image of Tom Wharton flashed through his agony and he rose with a bitter curse.

He slipped the picture into his pocket; where were they now? On the road to London — London. Something soft brushed against him, and he mechanically glanced down.

It was the black cat.

He remembered now why he had come and laughed weakly at his own folly as he caught up the kitten and thrust it inside his waistcoat.

Somehow, hardly knowing what he did, he stumbled to the door.

Smoke was now rising up the stairs; he felt the air heavy and stifling. In a confused way he thought of Delia, of how he had last seen her standing by the library door and what she had said.

As he descended into the smoke and glare he thought that he heard her again, calling after him, shrieking:

"Lord Stair! I love you!"

He imagined that he saw her running up the stairs toward

him with her hair flaming behind her and her hands outthrown; he felt again her fingers on his wrist and gazed into her haunting face, and then it seemed that it was not Delia, but Janet in her night-dress with a ghastly smile on her face and a ghastly smear on her arm; then again it was his wife with a face full of loathing, spurning him bitterly.

With one hand over the black cat, he made his way down to the library door.

The flames had reached it; he looked on an utter ruin; part of the outer wall had fallen and the fire roared and hissed through the black gaps of the masonary louder than the yells of the triumphant mob.

And there between the door and the foot of the stairs lay Delia, face downwards.

He cried out to her hoarsely; the flames were curling round the edge of her dress; he beat them out and dragged her up; there was a mark like a purple stain on her forehead; she had been struck down by some falling wood.

He pulled her to her feet; she hung unconscious over his arm; the house was crashing about them and the strengthening flames rippled and sang as they leaped upwards. With the strength of desperation he dragged her to the library window and there laid her down while he flung aside the encumbrances of his coat, sword and peruke.

The terrace was still clear though it glowed brightly in the light of the flames, and the garden was illumined from end to end.

Delia moaned and sat up; he helped her to her feet; she leaned heavily against him while he unfastened the long windows. With difficulty he got her across the terrace and down

the gardens, and heard the mob as if it saw them; she was slipping into insensibility again; feebly she clung to him, impeding his progress, and when they reached the fountain of Hylas she fell forward heavily in his arms.

He looked down at her in a kind of cold fury. Behind him was his burning home; he saw before him a ruined life; he thought of Lady Stair — her work — all of it her work.

By the dead weight of her body he knew her unconscious; he let her slip to the grass and turned to face the burning mansion behind him.

The flames rose through the summer night magnificently terrible; the whole sky was alight with them; they blotted out the stars. And she, lying quiet enough at his feet now, — she had done it.

"My lord," came a timid voice. "My lord."

The servant who had remained came forward from the shadows of the trees.

"My lord," he cried again, startled at his master's appearance and the woman huddled on the grass.

The Earl stared at him vacantly.

"Why did you stay?"

"I did not think that they could enter the garden, my lord, and I waited for your lordship — escape is easy, my lord, by the lane beyond the stables."

Lord Stair put his hand to his head.

"Can you get this woman to Lumley's?"

"There are the horses, my lord — if we could carry her."

Lord Stair was gazing at his house, flaring, flaming into the sky. He turned and helped the man to carry Delia down the garden.

"Put her on one horse, mount behind. Take with you a couple of the others."

"Ah, my lord, quick. I see figures entering the garden."

Lord Stair motioned to the man to begone.

"Go ahead and acquaint Lumley of my approach."

CHAPTER VI

"THERE WAS NO MASSACRE IN GLENCOE"

IN the back parlor of Lumley's shop in the Cannon Gate, Lord Stair sat with his elbows on the table, smoking a long clay-pipe.

Along the oak settle which was drawn up close to the fire lay Delia with her head motionless on a pile of brilliant cushions and her hands slackly clasped on her bosom.

For her pallor and her stillness she might have been of marble, but now and then she moaned a little and her breast rose with her troubled breath.

Sweeping the great bruise on her temple the long hazel curls fell straightly to the floor and glimmered in the firelight.

It was a little room hung with thick and very rich stamped leather and containing the choicest of Lumley's stock as silversmith and jeweler; on the wide mantelshelf stood a full-rigged ship in beaten gold, a great crystal glowing at the poop; either side of this were two bloodstone candlesticks finely set in silver.

A handsome walnut sideboard held goblets and vessels of all sizes and shapes, glasses cut and painted and a huge china punch-bowl decorated with flowers.

On the table at which Lord Stair sat were curios of beautiful workmanship: a salt-cellar in the form of a silver whale with a mother-of-pearl body; a warrior in rock crystal with an agate helmet; a dish of Limoges enamel, purple and green;

a gold embossed vase with a ruby-eyed nymph curling round it; a Venice glass, milk-white and blue; a bronze clock with an enamel face; an Eastern dagger and women's ornaments.

Lord Stair gazed at these things with vacant eyes; in and out of the gold and silver ran the little black cat, lightly in a ghostly silence.

There were arms and swords against the wall, flashings of steel, bronze and gold came from them as the candles flickered in their massive stand; the room was strange, gloomy, full, it seemed, of memories and ghosts of the past.

The Earl, in his frilled shirt, his long black embroidered waistcoat, his riding-boots, spurs and glittering rings; swordless, with his lace cravat undone and hanging to his knees, with his unnatural pallor and his close hair, looked in keeping with his curious background, as if he too had been called up from some earlier day; to do penance for a crime or brood over a tragedy among these tokens of wealth and splendor.

Now and then he glanced toward the woman on the settle, but with neither pity nor tenderness, coldly, indifferently, as if he cared nothing whether she lived or died.

And up through the somber air rose the thin wreaths of smoke, thin blue from his pipe and the little cat played in and out of the silverware and the drooping lace and cambric of Lord Stair's sleeve, trailing his scarlet ribbon.

Opposite the table were the two windows, close shuttered, and between them stood a black bureau that bore a casket in bright enamel; above this hung a mirror and Lord Stair could see his own ghastly face reflected there, the dim room behind it like a mockery of himself and his thoughts.

Occasionally Delia's little moan would break the heavy

stillness and then he would look toward her with pitiless blue eyes.

She might be dying; they could do nothing for her; there was not even a better place in which to put her; Lumley did not live over his shop, the rest of the house was empty; Lord Stair's servant had gone in search of a doctor; it was not likely, with the city in an uproar, that he would find one to come on a dangerous errand; and with every breath she drew her life was ebbing, or so, gazing on her unmoved, he thought.

As the firelight rose and fell over the crystal warrior, the ruby-eyed nymph and the still face of the dying woman, as the candles flickered and burnt nearer to their silver sticks, as the shadows advanced and receded from all dim corners, the Earl of Stair sat motionless with a hard face, and the smoke curled upwards and away round the ceiling.

Time did not exist here, it had died with the stopping of the enamel clock; everything was very old and dead, yet immortal, this room had known many yesterdays; it held no promise of a to-morrow; it owned the peace of dust and ashes, the silence of things ended, done with. Here was a place to meet fate, not to avert it; as the fire dropped to ashes, as the woman swooned into eternity, the placid warrior and the red-eyed nymph smiled up at Lord Stair with the smiles of a hundred years ago, and the emptiness of the hollow armor grinned into the likeness of a skull.

Shadows advancing, receding, and her slow breath as her soul drifted away.

If by putting out his hand he could have stopped her flight, he would not have done it; if by raising a finger he could have recalled her fainting life, he would not have done it.

It was the inevitable; let her die as the fire sank to ashes,

as the ashes dropped dismally into the hearth; it was the inevitable.

Still the little cat played lightly to and fro, leaped over the hand dropped by his side and pulled at the lace on his sleeve.

The mother-of-pearl whale glittered with many colors, the candle-light circled the milk-white glass like bright wine, the immortal warrior gazed up under his agate helmet, and the siren's eyes gave forth red sparks of light.

In a little while she would be as they; as silent as cold in death as they; as utterly beyond all speech, all question or demand, inscrutable. He looked at the clear-cut features, the sweep of the lashes, the parted lips, the locked hands and the long still figure.

She had said she loved him.

She held him guilty of things he had not done; of her friend's betrayal, which was his father's work; of Jerome Caryl's mysterious death, perhaps if she had known — But none of it mattered; the tragedy was played to its close and death would draw the curtain over all explanations.

She had loved him.

He knew of no other who had; in his whole life no other.

Let her go — unquestioned.

In apathy of soul, he gazed on her and as he gazed she opened her dark eyes.

Opened wide her eyes and sat up, leaning on her elbow.

"Lord Stair."

He could not tell if she could see him, her glance was dim and vague as if she addressed some fancied image of him.

"The blood of Glencoe," she said slowly. "They shall never speak of you without they curse you — for Glencoe — "

She stared at the candle-light, leaning forward.

"Have I damned myself, my love — to fix this stain on you? — I feel the flames — and I have lied — you also, Lord Stair — you lied to me."

A look of horror settled on her face.

"Don't go — stay with me — don't you see them — the flames? so they rose in Glencoe — you are paid — "

Her voice sank to a whisper; the last log on the hearth fell into ashes.

"Kiss me — why have you never kissed me? — you asked me when they were singing — 'for the ways of the Lord are wonderful — ' Kiss me — "

His pipe fell from his inert hand and broke into fragments on the floor.

"Lord Stair."

He did not move from his seat.

She had fallen back on her pillow; one hand trailed along the floor.

"You asked me — Andrew — "

He remembered when he had asked her; the Abbey, her words and his.

"When you ask me — "

And now — A great silence settled on the room; shadows advancing, receding, and her breath stilled forever. The nymph's ruby eyes flashed brilliantly; the crystal warrior smiled the same; she had gone, forever. Beyond question or explanation, inscrutable, silent. After a while he rose and went to look at her; she had died as if she had fallen asleep, he lifted her cold hand from the floor and laid it on her breast.

Then he went to the window and undid the shutters.

The slipping back of the bolts made a dismal creaking; the hinges groaned; he opened the shutters and gazed through

the glimmering window-pane. A wine-colored dawn was breaking over the housetops like a stain over the sky.

From the corners of the room the shadows lifted; on all the old gold and gems a faint white light; on all the wonders of precious workmanship and on that most wonderful thing of all, the woman lying along the settle with the veil of her hair falling to the floor and her head thrown back on the bronze and purple Persian cushion which bore a sprawling dragon with emerald eyes.

Her curved mouth was parted as if that last breathing of his name had drawn her soul with it and left her lips cleft; there was no line in her smooth face, beneath the soft lashes were delicate shadows and across the sweep of her throat lay a strand of hair and its double in shade.

She was the hue of a white rose against the vivid tints of her cushions; her face was as unfathomable as her silence.

The fire had dropped into ashes; the dawn strengthening showed dust on everything; dust on the tarnished silver, on the sails of the gold ship, on the empty armor.

There were cobwebs, high up among the shelves that showed now; cobwebs clinging to and obscuring the splendor of the gold and silver.

The black cat leaped from the table, ran round the room, then began playing amid the ashes and the ends of Delia's hair.

Lord Stair crossed to the head of the settle and stood looking at the dawn behind the diamond panes.

The curse of the Dalrymples was fulfilled now; surely, to the last bitterness, completed.

He glanced down at Delia — what had she said? — "for the ways of the Lord are wonderful" — Wonderful! he

laughed to himself — she had loved him, had ruined him, and had died because she could not face what she had done. Was she a fool or a heroine? — he could look at her coldly now and wonder, though she had moved him once.

The sun rose slowly, majestic into the clear sky; red-gold rays struck into the room and caused the candle-light to look faint and sickly; the armor, swords and pistols, shone as if on fire; Lord Stair put his hand before his eyes and leaned heavily against the carved post of the settle.

The deathly stillness was broken by the soft opening of the door, the soft closing of it, and a gentle step into the room.

Lord Stair looked round.

Standing against the armor, in the strange faint lights and shades was a woman in a light dress with the red glow of the dawn in her blonde hair and over her pale face; Lady Stair, looking at him intently, eagerly, with questioning blue eyes.

"Ulrica!" he could utter no word but her name; the blood rushed into his face as he stared at her, incredulous, amazed.

"I was too late," she said faintly; she sat down at his seat at the table; there were lines of weariness under her eyes, and her dress was tumbled. "My woman told you?" her hands holding a riding-whip, fell between the crystal warrior and the nymph on her gold vase. Lord Stair came in front of Delia, hiding her from sight.

"I have heard nothing," he said hoarsely. "When I returned the house was empty save for one man — "

"Oh!" she glanced up, bewildered by his manner. "I heard that they were going to burn the house — I did not trust the servants — I went myself to ask the Marquis for a guard — he sent me on to the castle — and there they put such difficulties in the way — and — I was too late."

She leaned back wearily.

"They sent some men — they are putting the fire out now — the city was in such an uproar that I could not return sooner — I thought that you might be here so I came. You never got my message?"

"No."

She leaned forward.

"What is the matter, my lord? I did all I could."

"Yes — ah, yes."

He was looking at her very strangely. "Did you not guess where I had gone?"

She pressed her handkerchief to her lips and her lids fluttered in a weary manner.

Lord Stair came to the other side of the table.

"So, Ulrica, you stay to share my fallen fortunes?" he asked in a low voice.

She looked at him calmly.

"Did you think anything else of me?"

"My thoughts!" he said wildly. "Let my thoughts go — I know not what I thought — "

Their eyes met across the table of gold and silver —

"Ulrica — what made you stay?"

Her eyes widened.

"It never crossed my mind to go. Whatever they say — my place is not among your enemies."

A little pause, then he said in a labored way: "Ulrica — I am innocent of what they impute to me — there was no massacre in Glencoe."

"I thought so," she answered quietly. "My lord, I thought so."

Her hood had slipped back from her smooth hair and her sweet face was pure and pale in the rich light.

"Have you saved anything?" she asked.

Lord Stair pointed to the kitten at his feet with a half-smile.

"That," he said, "and this — "

He drew Cooper's drawing from his pocket and laid it by the crystal warrior.

Lady Stair's eyes fell to it, then lifted to his face; a color came into her cheeks and she rose trembling.

As she turned she caught sight of Delia and cried out in a frightened way with blanched cheeks.

"Hush!" said Lord Stair; he was beside her looking at the dead woman. "She has fixed on me the blood of Glencoe — and she has paid — hush!"

Lady Stair shrank away, still with terror in her eyes. "Who was she?" came her whisper.

"Do you want to know? Does it matter now?"

"No! no!"

She shuddered against the table, gazing at Delia's terrible calm against the background of the strange room.

Lord Stair looked at the burning sunrise and held out his right hand; the glowing light fell on it, a crimson stain.

"You see — the blood of Glencoe!"

He laughed magnificently and turned to his wife; his face was wild in expression, his eyes wide open. "And you, of all of them, have been faithful!"

She took her gaze from the dead woman, put out her hand and clasped his, so that the red was over her wrist, too.

"You of all!" he repeated, and his voice was unsteady. He drew her up to the table edge, close to him, her grasp of his hand tightened; her breath came fast.

"John! John!"

He looked at her in a curious manner. "You of all!" he repeated, and his eyes wandered to Delia; he turned from the living to the dead whose lie was his judgment and his punishment and he smiled bitterly.

"John!" said Lady Stair again, faintly, softly.

With a little start he turned and looked at her.

"Ah — do you understand?" she said. "At last?" In the wild light of the red morn her blonde hair glimmered against his shoulder.

"At last — Ulrica — " his voice broke, but his eyes shone as his fingers closed over hers. "My dear! my dear!" And the day dawned upon their kiss.

EPILOGUE

THE GLEN O' WEEPING

THE sun that so rarely pierces the mists that shroud the Valley of Glencoe, was to-day shining mournfully on the solitude of the Glen of Weeping.

It was mid-July and above the snow-topped mountains the sky shone coldly blue.

A keen wind whistled through the winding ravines and patches of purple, dull gold and scarlet, showed where the heather, the gorse and the rowan bloomed.

The grass was studded with harebells and the pines grew fresh and green.

Yet the scene was desolation, utter desolation; in all the vast expanse there was no human being in sight, no animal nor bird. Only, bare to the wide sky, lay the scattered, ruined huts of the Macdonalds; the little creeping wild flowers had overgrown the ashes of the charred door-posts which lay half-hidden in the grass; the storms and winds of three winters had nearly demolished what the vengeance of the Campbells had left, but still above the rough graves made by the surviving Macdonalds for their kindred rose some few traces of the village of Makian.

And now it is past midday and the sad sun has disappeared behind the distant snows; a cold mournful light fills the valley, and the hollow about the sullen water is full of

shadows, to right and left silence save for the crying of the wind and sound of the swaying fir-trees.

Then the noise of bridle bells and horses coming rapidly across the heather and a cavalcade of some hundred men gallop down the mouth of the Glen; Campbells with red-blond hair.

Their leader is Breadalbane, he rides a white horse with steel and scarlet trappings, and his green and blue tartan blows out behind him across his shining cuirass; he rides easily, swiftly, with one hand on his hip above his sword and the other lightly on his reins; in his bonnet is a sprig of myrtle and his hair flutters pale as silver back from his face.

By his side is the Countess Peggy, her plaid floats from her shoulder and over her black horse; she leans forward a little in the saddle and her red curls frame a pale triumphant face.

After these come the Campbells, red gentlemen in dark tartans with faces singularly contained and hard light eyes.

Silently they ride through Glencoe, the Glen o' Weeping, their horses' hoofs stir the dead ashes from under the heather, they pass through the dismantled ruins, they gallop over the graves of their enemies but they raise no shout of victory, make no gesture of triumph.

It is the Campbell way.

Only as they pass through desolation, the Countess Peggy looks at her husband and he at her; their eyes meet and flash and her thin lips curve into a smile.

There — somewhere under their horses' hoofs lies Ronald Macdonald and the Campbells are free of Glencoe and all the Highlands.

Out of the Glen o' Weeping they come, the Campbells hard-faced, riding swiftly, and Breadalbane's wife looks at him with a deepening of her smile.

THE END

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Bowen, Marjorie
The master of Stair

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